

APPROVED FOR RELEASE: 2007/02/08: CIA-RDP82-00850R000200030014-1

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JPRS L/8803

7 December 1979

Near East/North Africa Report

(FOUO 48/79)

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NEAR EAST/NORTH AFRICA REPORT

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CONTENTS	PAGE
INTER-ARAB AFFAIRS	
Speculation Continues Unchecked in Gulf (THE MIDDLE EAST, Nov 79).....	1
Arms Reportedly Smuggled From Lebanon to Gulf States via Syria (AL-WATAN AL-'ARABI, 11-17 Oct 79).....	3
Analysis of Syria's Lebanese Policy (AL-WATAN AL-'ARABI, 11-17 Oct 79).....	4
ALGERIA	
Inside View of Ben Bella Before His Release (Ahmed Ben Bella Interview; AL-WATAN AL-'ARABI, 25-31 Oct 79).....	10
Gas Replacing Oil as Major Foreign-Exchange Earner (THE MIDDLE EAST, Nov 79).....	23
Briefs Aircraft Negotiations Rumored	25
IRAN	
Iranian Workers Besiege Japanese Office, Demand Payment (SHUKAN SHINCHO, 1 Nov 79).....	26
IRAQ	
Preparations for Elections Underway (AL-WATAN AL-'ARABI, 25-31 Oct 79).....	31

- a - [III - NE & A - 121 FOUO]

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CONTENTS (Continued)	Page
SAUDI ARABIA	
Briefs	
USSR Relations Request	36
TUNISIA	
Habib Bourguiba's Role in Outcome of Destourian Party Congress Discussed (Souhayr Belhassen; JEUNE AFRIQUE, 26 Sep 79).....	37
Fall of Abdallah Farhat From Power Discussed (Abdelaziz Dahmani; JEUNE AFRIQUE, 26 Sep 79).....	40
Tension Reported To Be Underlying Surface Calm (THE MIDDLE EAST, Nov 79).....	42
Prime Minister Discusses PSD Congress, Labor Problems, Plan (THE MIDDLE EAST, Nov 79).....	48
WESTERN SAHARA	
Saharan War Becoming Increasingly Large Scale Vendetta (JEUNE AFRIQUE, 24 Oct 79).....	50

- b -

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INTER-ARAB AFFAIRS

SPECULATION CONTINUES UNCHECKED IN GULF

London THE MIDDLE EAST in English Nov 79 p 106

[Text]

Businessmen in the Gulf generally seem to have forgotten what happened in Kuwait in 1977 when the Government had to come to the rescue of speculators left financially exposed by the collapse of the Kuwait Stock Exchange boom in that year.

In all the conservative oil-producing states of the peninsula and the Gulf there is a policy to encourage limited public ownership of national industrial, banking and commercial organisations. The only difficulty is that public demand for shares is considerably in excess of supply. The result is that, in the largely uncontrolled secondary markets in shares which flourish in the local *sugs*, speculators are having a field day.

The Kuwaiti Government can exercise some control over dealings in shares on the Kuwait stock exchange, but the governments of Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain, for example, have no control over the unofficial share markets operating in the *sugs*. The risk of a serious crash following the ending of a speculative boom cannot be discounted.

In offering shares in public corporations such as the Saudi Arabian Public Transport Company (SAPTCO) or the UAE's Emirtel telephone company, the governments are offering their subjects a limited economic vote in shaping future prosperity. In Saudi Arabia the Government is also determined that the next (1980-84) Five Year Plan will not be marked by the *dirigisme* which some critics maintained was at the heart of previous plans.

In Saudi Arabia there is also a commitment to a more formal capital market. The Government commissioned Chase Manhattan to make a study of the institutional and regulatory requirements of such a market. The growing number of local share offers being made after the Saudiisation of the foreign-owned commercial banks, coupled with the thriving secondary market in shares, is making government action to establish an official stock exchange more and more urgent.

The popularity of public issues of shares in corporations is undeniable. Every offer is heavily over-subscribed. People in the know have been heard to scoff at issues which have been

over-subscribed "only 12 times; of course, the offer was made just before Ramadan".

One of the most dramatic examples was provided in September of this year in the UAE when there was a virtual stampede for shares in the Gulf Medical Projects Company. Not far behind was the demand for shares in two new insurance companies set up in Bahrain under the state's exemption-company laws. In the case of Gulf Medical, a 20% holding in the company's capital of Dh75mn (\$20mn) was offered, and after the six day bid period it was announced that the issue had been oversubscribed 2,000 times. The result was that investors who had bid for the maximum of 10,000 shares of the six million on sale received an allocation of four shares each.

Some investors found that the interest on the money they had borrowed to make their bids exceeded the value of the shares they ultimately received. This absurd situation was put right when the company raised its capital, permitting the allocation to be raised to 12 shares per investor.

The Gulf Medical case is by no means unique. Shares in any

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company will be swallowed up indiscriminately the moment they come on the market; no regard is given to the prospects of a company, its management and the marketability of its products. The Sharjah Cement and Industrial Development Company offer was oversubscribed 272 times, a much more modest outcome than Gulf Medical, but still far more than the likely profitability of the company could warrant.

Perceptive ministers and officials in the conservative oil-producing states are worried about the implications of this extraordinary demand for shares. The danger of such unbridled speculation is obvious.

But beyond that, the best laid plans of governments to ensure that the small investor has a chance to acquire a share in the equity of a nation's industrial and commercial future seem to be failing in the face of the wiliness, determination, and in some cases the rapacity, of the larger merchants. A small investor acquiring, for example, one share in Gulf Medical is immediately offered four or five times the price he paid by a local millionaire, that is assuming that the small man was not acting as a nominee purchaser for the millionaire.

It is not only the perceptive few in government who are disturbed by the way in which the local capital markets are developing. The old-established

merchant families are concerned that their privileged position is being eroded by a new breed of entrepreneur who lacks the innate caution of the older families and who, by reckless speculation, risks damaging the whole commercial fabric of the Gulf societies.

Although the Kuwait stock exchange has now opened its doors to non-Kuwaitis, provided that they are Gulf Arabs, many Kuwaitis worry that the cosy old boys' club atmosphere of their stock exchange will be ruined by the feared influx of speculators with dubious reputations.

The boom in commercial paper in the conservative oil-producing states is also revealing an extraordinary excess of liquidity in the Gulf. Many people have made considerable fortunes, but there is, as yet, no obvious means of investing surplus funds in the area.

In general, investment in the United States or Western Europe is not popular; people fear currency crises and in some cases forced nationalisation. At the prices being paid for shares, there is little hope of any company being able to pay a dividend which would be regarded as a reasonable return. Unless this basic problem can be overcome, government action to regulate the market in shares amounts to little more than tinkering with a dangerous machine that risks getting out of control. □

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INTER-ARAB AFFAIRS

ARMS REPORTEDLY SMUGGLED FROM LEBANON TO GULF STATES VIA SYRIA

Paris AL-WATAN AL-'ARABI in Arabic 11-17 Oct 79 p 29

[Article: "36,000 Weapons to the Gulf?"]

[Text] At one of the meetings of the national front in Damascus, Khalid Bakdash, secretary general of the Syrian communist party, asked President Hafiz al-Asad to guarantee the Syrian forces' withdrawal from Lebanon. The Syrian president said to him, "When we met to make a decision to go into Lebanon, you and Naji Jamil were urging the front to adopt a decision to go in, and that day I was reluctant because of all the political considerations. Today, it was decided that it is necessary for us to remain in Lebanon to protect its unity and Arabism within the framework of Syria's nationalist role, and I see you urging withdrawal. Why?"

Khalid Bakdash replied, "I understand the situation. I am satisfied with your answer, Mr President."

This is what the source told AL-WATAN AL-'ARABI's special correspondent to Damascus. He is trustworthy and very well-informed.

Perhaps the most significant thing that a Syrian official told a Beirut leader who visited Damascus recently was: "There are operations being carried out by political forces in Lebanon, with international connections, to smuggle arms into certain Gulf states by way of Syria, under the guise of goods destined for export. We have uncovered some of these operations, but military reports reveal that more than 36,000 weapons have been smuggled into the Gulf area thanks to these networks."

AL-WATAN AL-'ARABI reports the Syrian source's story in good faith and with strict reserve.

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3

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INTER-ARAB AFFAIRS

ANALYSIS OF SYRIA'S LEBANESE POLICY

Paris AL-WATAN AL-'ARABI in Arabic 11-17 Oct 79 pp 28-29

[Article: "Damascus, the Lebanese Exit May Be Entry Into Relaxation in Syria"]

[Text] AL-WATAN AL-'ARABI sent a special correspondent to Damascus to investigate the truth of rumors circulating in Beirut about the withdrawal or re-grouping of Syrian forces in Lebanon. The following is his impressions about the situation in Syria and about Syrian-Lebanese relations, based on his contacts and conversations with Syrian politicians:

Official Syrian sources have referred, directly and indirectly during recent weeks, to a basic change in the strategy of Syrian political action within Lebanon, in light of changes which have occurred unexpectedly in the conditions of the area and in the Syrian internal situation itself, and in light of facts which experience has revealed, during the last 3 years, regarding the balance of Lebanese political forces.

What is happening today in Syria is the other side of what heppened in Lebanon. The plot is the same in the view of observers, although its instruments and some of its methods differ, and despite the fact that the elements of its success in Syria are much weaker than what they were in Lebanon, because of the difference of the area of action and the dissimilarity of levels of harmony with the winds of change. However, that does not prevent it from being the literal translation of a single text rendered in two different ways. It [the plot] is based on the use of terror and violence to incite sectarian strife, aimed at tearing apart the people's cohesiveness and solidarity and shattering the state and its institutions.

While observers are trying to draw up a list comparing events of the two countries and are examining facets of the similarity between the Aleppo slaughter in the artillery officers school or the parking lot incident in Latakia, with the autobus slaughter of 12 April 1975 in 'Ayn al-Rumanah, a southern suburb of Beirut, and while various political circles are detecting a chain of violence in certain Syrian cities and are connecting

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that with what happened in Lebanon during 1975-76, it appears that the plotters are finding more difficulty in carrying through their plans in Syria and on its territory because of several reasons, the most important of which is the victory of the national spirit in Syria over sectarian, regional and ethnic feelings during 30 years of carrying out the struggle.

For this reason the plan aimed at shaking the people's unity has found itself in a confrontation with the regime, in which President al-Asad has relied solely on his personal standing, after it became evident that the party was lacking, because he is exerting greater efforts to broaden his popular base and to establish a dialogue with other principal forces in the country.

No matter what repercussions the crisis may have in the near or long term, there is an important lesson which the crisis has dictated to the government and party in Syria. It is the need to change methods of dealing with incidents within Syria and in the rest of the Arab region, especially in Lebanon whose shifting sands and moving shadows alter many expectations and conflicts with them as the harvest estimate differs from the actual yield.

It has become clear now, as AL-WATAN AL-'ARABI has reported on previous occasions, that Syrian leadership is determined to make extensive changes on the governmental, party and national front levels.

Probably the changes will extend to dealing with accepted things which were axiomatic until recently, in order to keep the country from giving way to the plotters' goal, and so long as the change does not affect the basic structure of the government.

Therefore it is not unlikely that the Lebanese doorway will be one of the portals through which the Syrian internal change will pass. To put it more clearly, it is not unlikely that the main body of Syrian forces will be withdrawn from Lebanon, or that their re-grouping, along with reducing their size, in specific strategic areas will be one of the principal manifestations of the change in Syria.

That does not mean that Syria wants to lessen the level of its concern with Lebanon, but it does want to free itself of the burden of the details of life and the daily problems--and how many there are--in Lebanon, the total immersion and the distraction by them from Syrian internal issues and problems which have now become more important and increasingly urgent.

A senior Syrian official told me: "President al-Asad has been preoccupied by the events in Lebanon and the Syrian presence there for the past 4 years. However now he wants to allocate a greater part of his time to Syria's internal affairs."

The dominant feeling in official and party circles here is that al-Asad, personally, still has a good opportunity to remedy the causes which have

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led to the present situation in the country, and also that he has the capability to once again put the wheels of government on track. However, that requires considerable effort and daily, personal follow-up in order to carry out the public decisions and instructions issued from the national front. He knows that whenever his other problems preoccupy him, led by the Lebanese distractions, there are powerful forces capable of making those decisions merely ink on paper and honey sweet words of no more effect than a wish.

Therefore the trend was toward withdrawal from the daily entanglement in Lebanese details, details which have begun to revolve in a vicious circle, no longer of any benefit, a waste of precious time for the ruling establishment in Syria, aimless and futile.

Results of the Syrian Effort in Lebanon

Syria's gain from its initiative in Lebanon since the autumn of 1976 is scarcely worth mentioning in proportion to the efforts which it has made toward affecting the direction, even though there is a certain amount of firm cooperation between Lebanese political and national forces and the political and national forces in Syria, not to mention the direct official relations between the two governments and the revival of traditional cooperation between the two countries and their institutions.

It has been evident throughout the stages through which Syrian political strategy in Lebanon has passed, from the constitution during the regime of President Sulayman Franjiyyah, to backing "the Lebanese front" in its progress through the crisis of 1976, and then assisting the Lebanese Government in getting past the danger of a constitutional breakdown (the election of the president, the formation of al-Huss' first government, the election of the president of the Chamber of Deputies and the continuation of parliamentary life, and the establishment of the army's first elements) and finally backing the national movement and supporting the Palestinian resistance in the south and elsewhere, throughout all of these stages, it has been evident that Syria has only been able to find temporary allies. The need was and still is for solid popular and political bases, which will not be convulsed and vanish in regard to national allegiance, and which will be a true supporting force for Syria in any possible military confrontation with the enemy or in the cold war to which the two countries have together been exposed during the international conspiracy, no longer concealed from anyone.

If Syria works internally to continue the establishment of the national front, then it will still work in the Lebanese sector to create a broad national front. Its activity is also being aimed on the Palestinian level toward creating a cohesive national front which would reject the petty gang or the individualism concept for the benefit of any Arab or international faction, and which would stress unity of the struggle in order to attain final and honorable solutions to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

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Syria has succeeded to a large degree in its internal activity and in its Palestinian policy. However, its Lebanese efforts are still being thwarted by a group of basic problems resulting from the disparity of goals and methods and the mutually hostile atmosphere in a Lebanese arena filled with variables.

A quick look at the political map reveals how it has changed from 1976 to 1979, and how both the national movement and the Palestinian resistance have become Syria's friend and ally in Lebanon, after the "Lebanese front" had been the friend and the parties of the "nationalist front" the ally in 1976. This makes us aware to some extent of why the Syrian leadership was compelled in this Lebanese arena to alter its plans in the field and in circumstances which it does not consider to be natural, or rather which the facts of incidents, their developments, and their surprises forces upon them.

Those informed about the intricacies of the Syrian situation confirm that Syria was and still is working to bolster Lebanese legal authority in the interests of creating a broad national front. However, the waves of incompatibility which have created petty states in Lebanon since 1975, and it did not take them long to occupy the power of government, are still in the ascendancy and dangerously increasing, forcing the Lebanese Government into a position of passive, powerless spectator, instead of pursuing its basic job in keeping with the fact of Lebanese life which is that positive rule should be powerful.

Thus, the Lebanese authority cloaked in legality appears to be semi-isolated, as fully as the Syrian presence, which has taken on the legal presence in Lebanon, through joint Arab desire, appears to be a presence incapable of performing the roles it aspires to, achieving Lebanon's unity, security and stability in cooperation with the legal authority itself.

Syria has discovered, faced with the government's isolation and its forced banishment [from affairs] resulting from organic weakness, that it must have direct dealings with the various forces in the Lebanese arena. Thus it has shown two faces: the face of cooperation with the legal government, and the face of cooperation with the illegal petty states, frequently taking into account the legalities of the situation more than the legalities of principle.

Damascus' Relations with Lebanese Political Powers

If we were to take a quick look at relations existing at the present time between Damascus and the various political forces in Lebanon, they could be delineated as follows:

* "The Lebanese front": tense relations amounting to a degree of hostility and complete mutual repugnance in the summer of 1978. They then tended toward wariness and mutual doubt. During the last year, attempts were

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made to mediate between Damascus and the Lebanese front, but this collided with basic obstacles, the most important of which are the Franjiyyah family's position, the question of dealing with Israel and the Egyptian regime, and the front's position regarding the armed Palestinian presence.

Thus relations between Syria and the Lebanese front have ultimately become a kind of wary truce with both sides convinced that a military solution would not be beneficial.

* The "national front": It is an old ally of Syria, but Damascus' alliance with this front has created many difficulties because of the turncoat relations between this front and the parties of the national movement for one thing, with traditional Islamic forces for another, and with the Lebanese front for a third (the direct military clash between the Syrian Nationalists [SNP] and the Kata'ib [Phalangists]).

This is in addition to the fact that the "national front" lacks the heavy popular bases and the firmly established political preparation which ensures firm allegiance over the course of time, in addition to confusion of authority and struggle for influence which exists within the front itself.

* The "national movement": The nature of relations between Syria and the parties of the national movement differ and fluctuate between ordinary compliance and lukewarm friendship. While we see the Progressive Socialist Party having good relations and employing constant frank dialogue with the Damascus authorities, under the direction of Walid Junblat, we note that these relations have not reached the point of an open political alliance, which is being prepared for the broad national and nationalist front, in view of the antipathy existing between this party and certain important powers within the ranks of the right and the left.

As for the organization of communist action and the communist party, both their relations with the Damascus authorities appear generally tepid and many times tense, because of the control which Syria imposes over the communists. It is a question of Syria tying it to a large extent to its internal security.

As for the independent Nasirists (al-Murabitun), their increasing influence in Beirut has led to a slackening off in relations with Damascus, which rejects the principle of joining together in military authority especially in wide areas of the capital, and so wariness is currently dominant between the two parties.

The Syrian national socialist party is just about the only party whose relations between Damascus and itself are on the basis of mutual trust, especially since the Syrian leadership played a prominent role in forming it. However, basic doctrinal differences between Syrian nationalists and the Ba'athists are causing some reluctance in issuing a sure judgment on the future of these relations.

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There remains the various organizations, groups and minor parties which have no power and are more of a burden on Damascus' authorities than a help.

Therefore, it is clear that Syria has not achieved any of the goals to which it aspires through creating a popular national current which would be a safety valve for Syria itself, even though it has been able to limit the conspiracy's viciousness to a considerable extent and to weaken its nature during the past three years. The Syrians acknowledge this fact and confirmed it to a progressive party delegation that visited them 10 days ago. Foreign Minister 'Abd-al-Halim Khaddam told members of the delegation, "Syria will reconsider its existing relations with political forces in Lebanon, in light of the considerable experience gained during the past years."

This is precisely what Colonel Muhammad Ghanim, chief of Syrian intelligence in Lebanon, told Lebanese Prime Minister Dr Salim Al-Huss when the latter was reviewing with him the existing relations between Syria and Lebanese political forces shortly before al-Huss' recent visit to Damascus.

In the face of all this, observers are asking themselves about the nature of the change that Syria has decided to introduce into its policy in Lebanon. Most of them answer that it will give the government a completely free hand to impose its authority, after the Lebanese army has gained such a posture as to be fit for greater duties.

However, the problem is not that simple. It might be that the coming Arab summit conference, in agreement with Syria, will have a way to extract Lebanese legitimacy from the predicament from which the legal Syrian presence has been trying to extricate itself, before considering the problem of the south. This might be Syria's way to withdraw through the same door that it used in 1976 to reach the Lebanese shifting sands.

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ALGERIA

INSIDE VIEW OF BEN BELLA BEFORE HIS RELEASE

Paris AL-WATAN AL-'ARABI in Arabic 25-31 Oct 79 pp 6-10

[Interview with Ahmed Ben Bella by Nabil Maghribi: "The First Interview With Ahmed Ben Bella"]

[Text] This is the first interview with Mr Ahmed Ben Bella to be "leaked" out of Algeria. It took place a few days before his full release in the city of M'sila, which is 400 kilometers south of the Algerian capital.

Although Mr Ben Bella declines to receive journalists or non-Algerian citizens, AL-WATAN AL-'ARABI succeeded in conveying a group of questions to him to which he responded very clearly. He focused on his experiences in prison and on the ideas he had on the present and the future.

There is a story worth telling behind the success of AL-WATAN AL-'ARABI in conveying these questions to Mr Ben Bella.

The Picture From Abroad

When the eve of the first day of next November comes around, Ahmed Ben Bella, the first president of the People's Republic of Algeria, will regain his full freedom, pursuing his life and his rights like any Algerian citizen. He can travel and move freely throughout Algeria without restrictions. He can travel abroad and can return to the homeland whenever he wishes. He can express his views and his positions publicly and without censorship.

I learned from a well-informed source that the Political Bureau of the Liberation Front Party, which is chaired by Chadli Bendjedid, the secretary general of the party and president of the republic--the Political Bureau is known today in the jargon of Algerian politics as the political leadership--did take a unanimous decision to release Brother Ahmed Ben Bella. This decision was made during the bureau's regular weekly meeting that was held Saturday, the 22nd of last September.

The Political Bureau had issued a previous decision last July the 3rd for the conditional release of Brother Ahmed Ben Bella and for the termination of the house arrest restrictions under which he had been prisoner in a

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private home which he changed more than once. Ben Bella had been under house arrest since he was overthrown by the 1965 coup on 19 June. That coup was led by the late President Houari Boumediene who was at that time vice president and minister of defense.

This decision became effective on the 4th of July. That day coincided with the 17th anniversary of the independence of Algeria which was the outcome of the revolution of the million and a half martyrs that broke out in November of 1954. Algeria [has harnessed] all its energies and is preparing itself to celebrate its 25th anniversary next month.

Former President Ahmed Ben Bella chose the home of his wife's family in the city of M'sila which is located 400 miles south of the Algerian capital. He will reside there temporarily until the decision of a full pardon is announced. Informed sources think it likely that there was agreement between the political leadership and Brother Ben Bella on this decision and on its timing.

Ever since Ben Bella moved from [the condition] of being under house arrest to a life of limited freedom in the city and suburbs of M'sila, he has been receiving hundreds of Algerian citizens openly and without any restrictions except those that are necessary for security. He walks around town; he prays in the mosques of M'sila on Fridays; and he lunches or dines in public restaurants with his wife, the journalist Mrs Zahrah Salimi, and a number of his close friends.

Brother Ben Bella continued to decline receiving non-Algerians, even if they were his Arab friends. He did so out of respect for the agreement that was made between him and the Algerian authorities. He was postponing such meetings to the day when a decision about his full release would be issued.

The former president's family consists of his wife Zahrah Salimi who was a journalist for the leftist weekly magazine that was published in French after independence and was called REVOLUTION AFRICAINE. Ben Bella married her 5 years after he was placed under house arrest where he stayed for almost 14 years.

In addition to his wife Ben Bella's small family includes today two Algerian daughters whom the couple adopted 1 year after their marriage. Zahrah chose them from an orphanage for the children of those who were killed in the revolution in Oran. The elder is 10 years old; and the younger is almost 8.

The only request that Ahmed Ben Bella had made of his wife [in this regard] and had insisted upon was that one of the girls be white and the other black.

"Why, Mr Ahmed?" asked one of the Algerian citizens who was visiting him in his home in M'sila.

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Ben Bella replied in an eloquent Arabic that surprised his audience who knew how little Arabic he could speak before his arrest in 1965.

"This is a symbol of Arab-African brotherhood. It is the brotherhood in whose interaction and strength I see the cornerstone of the new historic confrontation with colonialism, Zionism, backwardness and fragmentation [that will occur] at the end of the 20th century."

Boumediene Decided...But

One of Ben Bella's close friends says that those who had raised the question of Ben Bella and had suggested to the Political Bureau that he be released were President Chadli Bendjedid; Mohamed Salah Yahiaoui, the party's business attache; and Col Belhouchet, former member of the Revolutionary Council. Today, in addition to being a member of the Political Bureau, Col Belhouchet is the inspector general of the army. He was also the one who was initially responsible for Ben Bella's arrest and custody. [He was charged with this responsibility] in the context of the military and security responsibilities he had at that time for the first district.

It is known with certainty in informed Algerian circles that the late President Houari Boumediene had decided more than once on Ben Bella's release, but that there were always unexpected circumstances that prevented him from actually making the decision.

Every time the council met it was Col Abdallah Belhouchet, member of the Revolutionary Council, who would bring up the subject of Ben Bella. He would get support from the late president and from a large majority of the council members.

These circles affirm that the last time the decision was about to be announced was in 1977, but the so-called "the smuggled weapons airplane to Algeria" operation was discovered, and announcement of the decision was postponed one more time.

One of the senior statesmen who was close to the late President Houari Boumediene on his death bed in Mustafa Pasha Hospital says that in his few moments of consciousness, Boumediene's eyes fell on Col Belhouchet, and he murmured, "Ben Bella." He was, however, heard clearly by everyone around him.

The Algerian statesman goes on in his conversation with his friends, "The late Boumediene was not impatient with those who took up with him the question of Ben Bella, as some thought he was. Boumediene did not hide his differences with Ben Bella, but he always said that the difference was objective and that it should stay objective and not become personal. Among those who continued to raise the question of Ben Bella most often were Tito, 'Abd-al-Nasir, Castro, Nyerere, Sekou Toure and some Arab friends, politicians and writers, with whom Boumediene had been meeting almost regularly.

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"Boumediene used to take advantage of these opportunities to bring up the matter [for discussion] at every Revolutionary Council by saying, "President so and so or brother so and so spoke to me about the question of Ben Bella."

The Risk

Very well!

I was able to obtain this information about the case of Brother Ahmed Ben Bella after entering Algeria recently in unusual circumstances that gave me opportunities to contact numerous Algerian figures who are important in the country's contemporary life. One feels the strong pulse of this country's life in different positions. It throbs for the purpose of continuing the course of putting the National Charter into practice, overstepping with awareness and with control the pains and the tremors that resulted from the absence of Boumediene, the strong man of the people and of the army.

The information is useful in drawing a sketch from the outside of Ben Bella, but is this information enough? Does it satisfy the sense of a journalist who is looking for the truth? No! One cannot approach the truth without supplementing Ben Bella's outside picture with his picture from the inside. One cannot put his hands on Ben Bella's picture without a direct interview with him.

And here lies the insurmountable obstacle whose attainment was impossible. Many of [our] fellow correspondents--Arabs and foreigners--have tried several ways to get an interview with Ben Bella, and they are still trying. I can provide from my information the names of more than 60 persons who attempted it, but [these correspondents] have not yet succeeded; they have not given up, however. Today, there are still 14 colleagues in Algeria who are planning or awaiting the appropriate moment.

Why do I not join in these attempts since circumstances have made it possible for me this time to be in the heart of Algeria?

I proceeded to knock carefully, cautiously and indirectly on doors, but they all remained closed. Everyone, including the person who accompanied me on the visit [to Algeria] advised me to stop trying, or at least to postpone my attempt until a suitable time in the future when Ben Bella would regain his full freedom.

The obstacles [that I encountered] were not only those that were made by officials, but they were also those made by Ben Bella who firmly declined receiving journalists. In fact he denied receiving non-Algerians, even if they were his friends.

The journalistic challenge provoked me, and my sense of provocation welled within me. To be in Algiers, only 400 kilometers from Ben Bella who was free and to be in these suitable circumstances and not to see him or talk to him [was unthinkable].

13

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I decided to show my acceptance of the fact, to cease my attempts and to pursue in secret, the different trouble-shooting methods of the profession in order to reach Ben Bella. I no longer had any course but that of taking a risk, regardless of its cost.

Briefly, the risk was a success. I do not want to reveal its secrets today because most certainly this is not the time to do so, even though the story deserves to be told in its details.

I am expressing my sincere apologies here to everyone for taking this risk. But my excuse is that I belong to the family of the press whose objective is to search for the truth even if that truth inconvenienced or embarrassed others.

At any rate, all that I can do today is reveal one secret that was essential to the journalistic risk [that I took]: I succeeded in making a group of Algerian brothers convey the questions of AL-WATAN AL-'ARABI to Ben Bella. They traveled quickly to M'sila where they met with Brother Ben Bella and asked him questions in an Algerian wording. Ben Bella replied spontaneously and candidly. As soon as I received the answers, I left Algeria immediately on the first airplane.

The Picture From the Inside: the Interview

[Question] By God, Mr Ahmed, how?

[Answer] Prison was not altogether a loss and an affliction. It can also be a blessing and a profitable experience for a human being if he so wishes. This blessing and this profitable experience may not be available to a human being if he continues to go around the whirlpool of life blindfolded either by rigid convictions; erroneous ideas; or emotions that are excessively preoccupied with the self, with power, with renown or with money. In prison the blindfold is removed from one's eyes--from the mind's eye and from the eye of the intellect. A person faces himself fully naked; his critical faculty is awakened so he can criticize himself and the experience of others to the utmost. In addition, a person acquires an extraordinary capability for love, for forgiveness and for understanding human weaknesses in people.

The fact is that I experienced in prison--I mean under house arrest--two stages. There was an extremely cruel and bitter stage of resentment that lasted for the first 3 years. And there was the stage of blessing and the profitable experiences that I obtained by challenging the cruel circumstances, by challenging myself and by reeducating myself and acquiring the capability of facing my errors and evaluating everything objectively. I armed myself with scientific knowledge and with the ability to show love and tolerance in analyzing everything: the revolution; the experience of government; the present and the future of Algeria; the Arab character and Islam; the question of Palestine; the problems of the Third World; the struggles on the international scene; the human product of the age of

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technology, of oil and of going to the moon; and the pitfalls of material and moral poverty that are becoming wider and deeper everywhere for man.

The First Years Were Harsh in Ezzaf

[Question] May God bless your parents, Mr Ahmed, and grant them salvation. How was that period of the first 3 years?

[Answer] The period of the first 3 years was physically and emotionally the harshest period of my being under house arrest.

Physically speaking, my activities were restricted to the utmost extent. Supervision was tight and severe in Ezzaf. During that period I was not allowed to contact my relatives outside, to examine newspapers or books, to hear the radio or to watch television. All that I had was the Holy Koran, and it was in fact an excellent companion. It reassured me and it soothed and fortified my heart, my nerves and my mind.

Psychologically, you can imagine, of course, the state I was in of being torn, bewildered and anxious because of the dreadful shock that I had to face suddenly and unexpectedly.

My psychological condition became even more critical when orders were issued to all the guards not to exchange any conversation with me on any matter regardless of the circumstances. [They were told] not to answer any question I put to them.

Thus I was not only imprisoned by walls, but also by the dreadful silence. I tried to break through the walls of silence, but I failed completely. The guards were carrying out their orders to the letter. I sensed that there must be a plan behind all this to drive me to insanity.

I decided to resist this plan with all my power, and my only weapon was the greatest weapon; I mean the Holy Koran.

I buried myself in its chapters. My Arabic language was at that time weak and it did not help me. But I persevered without weariness, and little by little, God Almighty opened the closed doors for me, and I entered into the boundlessness of purity and divine wisdom. The universe was opened to me and I absorbed knowledge insatiably. Suddenly the prison of silence collapsed around me in spite of the fact that the guards continued to observe their orders of not talking to me. The Holy Koran gave me extraordinary inner strength that I had never felt before; it gave me mental power, emotional power and even physical power. The more intensively I read in the Holy Book and repeated what I read, the more new things I discovered. I discovered numerous secrets of the universe and of life. And then my view of myself, of life and of people became more magnanimous and more pure; it became free from all malice or desire for petty or major revenge. I am well aware of the errors I made, and I forgive from my heart the offenses

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that others committed against me. I reconsider with deeper rational and moral capabilities everything that transpired in my life, all my sins and the sins of others so I can achieve a genuine and a sincere degree of what I believe is self-criticism and criticism of the experiment and of others with affection and tolerance. God was benevolent with me, and he enabled me to study all parts of the Koran. Suddenly I became fluent in Arabic to the degree that I now smile or laugh at myself when I remember how awkward my Arabic language used to be; how difficult it was for me to speak in Arabic; and how many mistakes I made when I expressed myself in Arabic.

From the gate of the Holy Koran I went to study the tradition of the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him salvation. Then I went to the books of jurisprudence with their different orientations. Then I went to the most authoritative Islamic references in philosophy and sociology such as those of Ibn Rushd, Ibn Khaldun, al-Hamadani and others. I did this after the first 3 years went by and I was allowed to ask for any books I wanted.

Then the 3 years passed peaceably in spite of their cruelty. I came out of these 3 years having won my religion, myself, my tolerance and my love for my fellow man even if he declared his hostility to me. The fact that one discovers the human side of one's enemy is in reality [like] finding a friend under the enemy's skin. It makes one rise above the petty matters of the world and of one's own selfish ills; it purifies one from the shortcomings of malice, of revenge or of vengeance.

The Guards Turned Into Companions

After God pulled me through the crisis of the first 3 years, the atmosphere changed and became clear. The guards turned into companions and friends who devoted themselves to my service and my comfort and talked with me during the day and night. The walls of silence and isolation were shattered, and I began seeing relatives and close friends and reading any Algerian and non-Algerian newspaper I wanted. I listened to the radio; I watched television; and I kept up with everything that was happening in the homeland and in the world. I committed myself to a daily regimen to educate myself in philosophy, politics and economics.

I Bear the Late Boumediene No Malice

[Question] By God, Mr Ahmed, how do you now view your experience with the late Boumediene?

[Answer] May God have mercy on him. My God have mercy on our brother Boumediene. We struggled together for Algeria with all the fighters and the masses of the people. We were in agreement for some time, and then we disagreed. And what has been has been.

The truth is that both of us, he and I, were victims of very complicated and very mysterious circumstances in whose midst we found ourselves after

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the revolution achieved victory and the country achieved independence. [There was the task of] building the state; [there was] a vacuum; a lack of cadres; and there were conspiracies planned against us so that we would be forced to go to French colonialism or to any other colonialism to ask for assistance.

With our lack of experience, and at the same time, our insistence upon total reliance upon ourselves, we had to embark upon the dangers of politics and to chart a course that none of us had previously experienced.

I embarked upon the dangers of politics, and I ultimately became the victim of politics. As a fighter, may God have mercy on him, Boumediene embarked upon his course of political dangers, and he too became a victim of another kind. But each one of us did what he believed at that time was his duty.

In all honesty and truthfulness, I bear the late Boumediene no malice. Quite the contrary, I understand him well after uncovering the human side within him, and I made peace with him.

I no longer see politics as cold and absolute tactics even when it contradicts values. Successful and effective politics is the politics of civilized men with vision; the character of modern man makes him refrain primarily from revenge.

Against Settling Accounts

I am returning to freedom having been completely purified from any desire to settle any accounts with any one of them regardless of who he is or of the position he had taken regarding my experience. I am returning to freedom with a desire to devote every sincere effort as a citizen to our dear Algeria and to its progress forward. About this let me say that it is necessary that we be armed with revolutionary humility. We must review what happened with a comprehensive, realistic and tolerant view. We must have the courage to criticize ourselves and our experience publicly. I humbly will be the first to present my errors and to criticize them.

[Question] May God have mercy on your parents, Mr Ahmed! What are these errors?

[Answer] There have been numerous errors. The truth is that prison enabled me to carry out a process of comprehensive and important revisions of my experience and my responsibilities in government through the experience of the revolution and that of the government of independence and its struggles.

From these revisions I deduced that we, and I was at the forefront, concentrated on pursuing a policy that was purely theoretical in nature and divorced [from reality]. Sometimes it was completely isolated from reality and from its given situations. We used to solve the problems as we understood them and not as they were in society. We were more concerned with philosophies and slogans than we were with life as it was experienced.

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Hence, our policy was in fact more theoretical than practical. When theory clashed with action, we absolved the theory and tried to impose it forcefully on reality. This practice may still be found extensively in many of the experiences of the Third World.

During the prison years, I learned that politics is action; it is behavior; it is changing reality. Accordingly, it must begin with reality, from its living substance and not from theoretical thoughts and ideas. Politics must be turned into a practical policy that does not yield blindly to theory regardless of the capabilities of that theory. Politics must have substance that may be translated into specific actions with specific time-tables to achieve specific goals. It must not be a superficial policy whose chief concern is to consider those who disagree with it or those who have different opinions or positions to be dissenting and retrogressing from the revolution.

The truth is that the difference between an abstract theoretical policy and a practical policy which is based on intellectual and social alternatives is the difference between adolescence and maturity. In various degrees, we all fell into adolescence.

And There Is the Problem of Democracy

There is also the question of democracy. We, and I was at the forefront, did not give democracy the measure that was necessary for its growth and fruition. Democracy continued to be a question urgently waiting for an answer while we ignored it or offered marginal answers.

The truth is that the regime or the government in our country--as governments are in progressive Arab countries and in the countries of the Third World--continued to revolve around the progressive, national individual leader who had [the people's] trust; it did not revolve around constitutional institutions and popular organizations.

The center of government continued to revolve around the individual leader when I was responsible for the government and during the administration of Boumediene, may God have mercy on him. In fact, the role of the individual leader was gaining strength at the expense of the role of the people and their institutions. This is a serious flaw in democracy which the people, the party and the state cannot do without. [It should be corrected] so that the institutions can become effective and immune to the diseases of bureaucracy, neglect, corruption and the conspiracies of enemies.

There is also the question of recalling our national history in a manner that would enable us to look at it as continuous periods without divisions that we ourselves would make in accordance with our personal preferences. We should judge every period not according to our notions of today and our current circumstances, but rather according to the notions and the circumstances of that age. Many of those we have swept aside in revolutionary enthusiasm and impetuosity or because of our personal preference were pure

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and innocent nationalists and fighters. Whether they are movements, organizations or individuals, we must restore to them their full regard.

Yes, we must criticize ourselves and re-evaluate our history with objectivity and honesty. Generations have a right to the continuity of history which must not be tainted and manipulated.

There Is Also the Question of the Party

There are many other questions...[such as] the question of the party.

The political organization of the revolution was the liberation front. This was necessary and in consonance with the nature, the spirit and the goals of the revolution. The front includes and should have included every Algerian who rejected French colonialism and dedicated his life, his wealth and his children to take part in fighting it. After independence we replaced the sign of the front with that of the party, but the party grew weak and continued to grow weaker until it became a mere sign without vitality. Accordingly, we lost the role [it could have had] in influencing [affairs] and leading [the nation]. Why [did that happen]?

We did not study this problem with the necessary earnestness. Some movements are calling for pluralism. Is pluralism possible or necessary for democracy? Where would its scope be? Would it be inside the party or outside the party? Must we continue in the form of a party, or must we change our organization so that it would comprise the organizational form and the formulae of a front? For 14 years I asked myself these questions, and today I ask myself these questions again. I do not claim to have ready, absolute answers.

But I do have a few preliminary ideas for discussion. In general, this is a question that only the people themselves will settle.

The Socialist Experiment Is Essential...But

[Question] By God, Mr Ahmed, what about...?

[Answer] The socialist experiment was and still is the essential and the inevitable solution for Algeria. But the error that we fell into with regard to socialism is that we continued to tie it to rigid notions that we revered and worshiped as though they were idols. We did not tie socialism to life. We were imitators more than innovators and creators. We saw socialism in the circumstances of others. But we did not see it carefully and deal with it creatively in our own special circumstances which are quite different from the circumstances, the heritage and the spiritual values of others.

I do not believe that socialism can succeed in our country if it does not take into consideration the specific features of our reality. Chief among these specific features is the fact that our country is Islamic, and Islam

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has its own progressive view on life and its own notion of socialism. People are equal like the teeth of a comb.

At any rate, prison gave me the opportunity to make significant revisions.

I did in fact write 1,400 pages that I hope to publish in a book in two volumes. Before I publish the book, I will show it to a number of friends so that I may get their observations, their criticism and their corrections of the specific details of the facts or events where my memory may have failed me. It is a book about my experience as one of the fighters in the revolution, in government and in prison. I deal in that book with everything in the past and in the present, and I try to look over the horizons of the future and to raise the questions that I have for discussion. I do that to the best of my effort. It is God who grants success.

'Abd-al-Nasir, al-Sadat and Camp David

[Question] My God have mercy on your parents, Mr Ahmed. What else can you tell us about these memoirs?

[Answer] Of course. My writings dealt with Arab and international events and figures. Among those figures, for example, is Jamal 'Abd-al-Nasir, may God have mercy on him. He was a great, progressive, nationalistic leader. He achieved much for Egypt and for the entire Arab homeland. No one denies that but a blind or an ungrateful person. But the great man did also have shortcomings. Like all human beings, one of his shortcomings was the fact that he made the social and political national movement revolve around an individual leader.

This is what broke the continuity of Egypt's Arab course and of its socialist development. In the absence of the centralizing [influence of] an organized popular movement, of constitutional institutions and of popular organizations, this absence of continuity in Egypt's Arab course allowed the occurrence of this major dangerous twist whose effect goes beyond Egypt to the entire Arab homeland. I was referring to the Camp David Accords and to the separate peace with Israel under the leadership of al-Sadat with his centralized, individual leadership also. Al-Sadat's leadership represents another political and social nature that is different from that of the late 'Abd-al-Nasir. Camp David was a catastrophe. If all of us, Arabs and Moslems, do not overcome it quickly, it will drag us into a bottomless pit that will take us back scores of years.

After dealing with the Algerian question, my writings deal with the Arab question.

In my opinion the essence of the Arab question is the Palestinian question. Failing to achieve victory in the Palestinian question or stabbing it in the back will lead all Arabs into mazes of wretchedness and fragmentation, regardless of their countries and their inclinations, and they will fall again into the chasm of colonialism which, through its strong and new

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institutions, covets their oil, their markets and their strategic locations. Colonialism wants to establish Zionist hegemony. What is being done so far to support the liberation organization, the only legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, is very little and is not adequate on the part of the Arabs in spite of the fact that their destinies are fully tied with the destiny of Palestine. I am even noticing that some well-intentioned Arabs as well as others with evil intentions are going along with colonialism in its plans to abort the Palestinian Revolution. Sometimes, the methods of these plans are obvious; at other times they are clandestine. It were as though the Arabs had been charged with the task of preventing the revolution from achieving victory that would bring about freedom and progress for Arabs through the victory of the Palestinian Revolution against Israel.

What I wrote also deals with the fact that our destiny in Algeria and our destiny as Arabs are tied to the destiny of the Third World. I dealt with the necessity of unifying the Third World's movement in all areas against the new racist, imperialist attack. I give special significance in this unification to the establishment of an Arab-African brotherhood with strong ties.

The Core of the Arab Character Is Islam

I pay special attention to the Islamic dimension of our movement whose core is Islam not only because Islam is the religion of the vast majority of the faithful nations [of the Arab world], but rather because it is the springhead of thought and culture which nourishes the Arab character and makes it non-racist and religiously tolerant. Without this dimension we lose our national personality and our spiritual values that move us to struggle for freedom and for progress, and to mobilize our people in a profound manner to oppose different forms of colonialism, exploitation, tyranny, racism and fanaticism.

Lebanon? Cain and Abel!

[Question] By God, Mr Ahmed, what...?

[Answer] What is happening in Lebanon is heartbreaking. It is a crime for which all the Lebanese and all the Arabs are responsible. It brings back to our age the story of Cain and Abel. The crisis of Lebanon is the crisis of the Arabs' inability to oppose colonialism Zionism and backwardness, not to mention the horrid bloody fanaticism which is forbidden by both Islam and Christianity. Unless the Arabs cooperate with good persons who are among the people of Lebanon and in the legal government of Lebanon to temporize the civil strife, its fires will extend to all of them.

Final Touches

Thus ends the dialogue with Brother Ahmed Ben Bella. It sketches his picture from the inside. What remains are a few final touches.

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Ahmed Ben Bella is over 60 years old. He is in good health, and his body and his movements are closer to those of a 35-year old man. He does not have a single grey hair, and he has not lost a single tooth.

Ben Bella exercises by walking for at least an hour a day. He reads and writes for 3 hours and divides the rest of his day between family and receiving his visitors.

At the first Friday prayer he attended at the M'sila mosque, the worshipers cheered him. He raised his hands humbly to greet them and he replied, "Long live Algeria! May God help our President Chadli and his brethren, and may God have mercy on Boumediene."

When Mr Attaïlia, who succeeded Col Abdallah Belhouchet in the responsibility of guarding Ben Bella, went to Ben Bella, Ben Bella responded to him in a spirit of brotherhood and embraced him with fervor that surprised those who were present. This is because they knew that Attaïlia was known to be one of the strongest opponents of Ben Bella and the men in his government.

The Algerian authorities have placed two large cars at the disposal of Ben Bella. One is for his private use, and the other is to serve his family.

The rooms of the house at M'sila became overcrowded with books in Arabic, French and Spanish on Islam, philosophy, economics, politics and sociology. Ben Bella carried these books from his jail to the house of freedom.

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ALGERIA

GAS REPLACING OIL AS MAJOR FOREIGN-EXCHANGE EARNER

London THE MIDDLE EAST in English Nov 79 p 125

[Text]

Gas will replace oil as Algeria's major foreign-exchange earner over the next few years. Although the country will remain dependent on hydrocarbon exports at least until the end of the century, the gas-oil mix is changing dramatically in favour of gas. Oil production is tending to fall, but Algeria's new deal with El Paso means that gas revenues have been trebled.

The El Paso deal came at an opportune time. Six months ago, there was a risk of a significant shortfall in export earnings as a fall in oil production began, but now the abundant gas reserves are being tapped at the same time as the new oil prices have given a boost to revenues.

Additional foreign exchange is also coming from the export of 4mn tons annually of condensate, a byproduct of gas production, which fetches a 5% premium over Algerian crude oil. Coming on the eve of a probable peak in demand for debt-servicing, the additional earnings are seen as a blessing by the country's economic strategists.

The El Paso contract is certainly favorable to Algeria. The price of gas has been more than trebled from 37 cents to \$1.15 per million BTU fob. Deliveries of LNG under the El Paso I contract began last year and are now at the full capacity of 10bn cubic metres a year.

The significant new element in the gas pricing arrangements is that they are linked to OPEC base prices for crude oil. A Sonatrach official told The Middle East that the new pricing strategy is intended to avoid competition between gas and oil as an energy source. In the words of Nordine Ait Laoussine, former Vice-President of Sonatrach, the Algerians believed that it was "essential and inevitable" that gas prices should rise so that OPEC's vast gas reserves could

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be exploited profitably. These resources, Laoussine said, represented "the biggest readily available source of new energy potential for the future".

Algeria, with the world's third-largest gas reserves, after the Soviet Union and the US, has been in the vanguard of the movement to link gas prices to crude oil prices. The indications are that Algeria's move will be followed by the other major oil exporters, most of whom are trying to extend price-fixing arrangements to sales of gas.

Gas pricing is likely to be on the agenda of the next OPEC ministerial meeting, in Caracas in December this year, with the expectation that a common "marker" price for gas will be agreed.

Sonatrach officials told *The Middle East* that it was probable that new contracts negotiated with European customers for natural gas would use broadly the same formula as the El Paso contract.

Algeria has shown commendable consistency in its plans for the exploitation of its hydrocarbon reserves, though signs are now emerging of a shift in emphasis away from LNG plants towards piped natural gas. The Algerian experience has been that LNG plants are expensive to construct, to operate and to maintain, and that they are dependent on sophisticated (and imported) technology and labour.

Poor management and

operation of existing plants means that some are operating at 30% below their rated capacity; some experts put the production shortfall even higher. Inevitably the relatively poor performance of the LNG plants in operation has placed a question mark over projected plants. It seems unlikely, for example, that the plants planned for Skikda Est and Les Issères will be built.

Instead, investment resources are likely to be put into the construction of a second pipeline to Italy via Tunisia. As some 80% of Algeria's gas is exported to Europe, such an investment would seem to be eminently sound. Gas exports are expected to peak at over 78bn cubic metres a year by the mid-1980s, and gas is likely to be the principal foreign-exchange earner until, at least the year 2000.

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ALGERIA

BRIEFS

AIRCRAFT NEGOTIATIONS RUMORED--Are some Mustere aircraft slated to replace the Fouga-Magister aircraft of the Algerian air force? A French military mission is negotiating secretly in Algiers. [Text] [Paris PARIS MATCH in French 30 Nov 79 p 43]

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IRAN

IRANIAN WORKERS BESIEGE JAPANESE OFFICE, DEMAND PAYMENT

Tokyo SHUKAN SHINCHO in Japanese 1 Nov 79 pp 36-39

[Text] It was 0700 14 October 1979 (Sunday) Japan time. The weather was fine for the first time in many days and a former company director was planning to go golfing when he was unexpectedly detained by a telephone call from an acquaintance assigned to Tehran, capital of Iran.

The gist of the phone call from Tehran, which took 45 minutes, was as follows:

"Sorry to bother you. Appealing to you will not help us but I do not know to whom I can appeal so please listen to what we Japanese in Iran have to say. I have heard that in Japan it was decided to use national tax money to resume construction (Note: cabinet decision on the 12th), which Mitsui & Co., Ltd. [Mitsui] failed to accomplish, of the Iranian petro-chemical plant (Note: the Irano-Japan Petroleum Corporation [IJPC], a joint company with Iran). Ezaki, Ministry of International Trade and Industry [MITI] Minister, is visiting Tehran. But do you think such a venture will succeed?

As a matter of fact, a terrible thing is happening now in Tehran. A large number of Iranian laborers have besieged the Tehran office of Fudo Construction Co., Ltd. [Fudo] which is doing subcontract work for Mitsui on IJPC, and are persecuting four Japanese, including the resident manager. They are demanding immediate payment of layoff compensations totaling 8 million rials (approximately 24 million yen). If Fudo makes such compensations, they will make the same demands of other Japanese companies one after another. If Fudo gives way, there is no telling what they will demand next, even if the IJPC plant construction is resumed. Since the February revolution, manpower costs have risen 30 percent. With such worries in my mind, I hurried to the Fudo office. There, I was taken by surprise. The company's four employees had already been held in captivity for nearly 15 hours, since yesterday morning, but Mitsui and the Japanese embassy had feigned ignorance...what time is it here? It is 0130 of the 14th. I tried my best to mediate and prevented the worst from happening, after which I went home, but the four Japanese are not likely to be released soon...."

26

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The telephone call from Tehran did not end here.

"What is Mitsui doing? That is the problem. They are having a big party to welcome Ezaki. Ambassador to Iran Wada is also present. Since all of the newspaper reporters are also invited to the party, no shred of news regarding the captivity will probably be reported in Japan.

"During the regime of former Shah Pahlavi, Mitsui arrogantly boasted that 'we are going to accomplish this task in place of the Japanese nation.' They bribed the Iranian Government and bragged to the Japanese contractors... Japanese entrepreneurs prayed at the feet of Mitsui. Heretofore, Mitsui took most of the margin from these entrepreneurs. They keep their profits and are now asking for tax money. No Japanese here will look favorably again at Mitsui. Even the Iranians are aware of Mitsui's actions during Pahlavi's regime. It's anyone's guess as to when IJPC will be nationalized."

Well, the story is that this "righteous indignation" had continued for some time.

After 32 Hours of Captivity

The four Japanese employees of Fudo were held captive from 0800 on the 13th to 1600 on the 14th (Iran time) or a total of 32 hours. Ironically, this is about the same period that Minister Ezaki and party were in Tehran.

On the evening of the 13th, through the auspices of Mitsui, a gala Japanese party called "Welcome to Minister Ezaki" was held at the Hilton hotel in Tehran. In addition to Minister Ezaki, MITI Trade Policy Bureau Chief Miyamoto, Deputy Director General Furuta of the Agency of National Resources and Energy, and Middle Eastern and African Affairs Bureau Chief Chiba of the Foreign Ministry, who accompanied Ezaki, were present at the party. Ambassador Wada and embassy staff members were also present. Approximately 60 Japanese residing in Iran were also there and a large number of them were Mitsui representatives in Tehran. According to a Japanese in Iran who attended the party, the Islam religion absolutely forbids alcohol and therefore, to call the party a "gala" might be an exaggeration. They toasted with juice and cola and the "food was so-so." But even so, this type of a party was a "lavish one" and "the first in Tehran since the revolution."

Tehran resident manager Wataru Shibata of Fudo, who had been held in captivity for 32 hours, was one of those who had been invited to the party.

"It was the morning of the 13th. Forty-five Iranian laborers suddenly appeared in our office. I was about to leave in a car but they pounded on the hood and ordered, 'You Japanese return to the office.' They were laborers who had come from Bandar Khomeyni, where the IJPC combinant is located, and were wearing turbans and sandals. They were southerners and many of them were of black Arabian color.

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"They did not use violence but they surrounded us and shoved their demands in our faces. In chorus (Sprechchor), they shouted 'pay money' in the Persian language. They cut the telephone lines and made it impossible to contact outsiders. I was scared." [Statement of Fudo resident manager Shibata.]

It is said that they carried a directive, "pay layoff compensations to these people," which was published by the "Abadan Labor Committee" of Bandar Khomeyni. The total payment was for 80 persons and 24 million yen in Japanese money. According to Fudo books, the employment contract with them had expired in December of last year and they had been "given termination pay."

In spite of that, they had been held captive for 32 hours. During that period, a member who had been permitted to go outside to purchase food-stuffs, made an SOS call to the Japanese embassy and Mitsui. However....

"The embassy personnel said, 'a minister is here from Japan and we are too busy,' or 'for the present, your lives are not in danger, is that right?' and refused to help. They did not even contact the police. As for Mitsui, they sponsored the party and 'congratulated themselves that the enterprise had become a national one.' They did not try to contact us. It was disheartening." (Statement of Fudo manager Shibata.)

The Hidden Aim of Mitsui?

The Iranian laborers, who reappeared in Tehran a week later, carried a "compulsory enforcement directive" from the Abadan District Court Office. The directive ordered that "unless payment were made by the deadline, arrests will follow."

The frightened Fudo procured the money in a hurry and proceeded to the district court office.

"This is like receiving the termination pay twice. From the Japanese standpoint, there is absolutely no need to pay this money. We also feel highly indignant about paying this money. The social conditions of Iran, however, are not that stable. The laborers want to take as much as they can get. It so happened that our office was open when many enterprises had closed their doors. We became their target. If Mitsui reopens IJPC, the Iranians will besiege them. In this unsettled situation, the only ones we can rely upon are the Japanese embassy staff but during the revolution, they were the first ones to run away. We have the deepest hatred for them." (Statement of manager Shibata.)

Demands of this type of layoff compensation (Note: there are some who say, "requests from laborers who have terminated their employment, as in the case of Fudo, are exceptional") against 12 Japanese enterprises in Iran total 500 million yen. Are such unreasonable demands being made because

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the society is under a revolutionary, dictatorial regime? Visiting researcher at the Iranian Philosophical Academy, Hajime Igarashi (presently back in Japan because of the revolution), says:

"Because Iran does not have labor-related laws, there are no regulations covering strikes and layoffs. In September of last year, there was an anti-Pahlavi strike at IJPC. In the midst of the strike, Iranian laborers came to the company and asked for their pay. The companies were forced to come up with a plan to pay wages to those who did not work and bonuses to those who did. It is common in Iran to ask for pay whether they are laid off or not reporting to work. One of the teachings in the Koran is 'those who possess should bestow blessings' and the Iranians are utilizing this 'to take without hesitation from those who possess.' There are some revolutionary committee members, however, who do not recognize such demands so there are no standards in Iran after the revolution. There is only confusion."

Among the Japanese residing in Iran, some say "even if IJPC resumes as a national enterprise of Japan, there is no telling what the Iranians will demand. The outlook is not only bad but extremely dark." Others claim, "neither the Japanese embassy nor Mitsui informed the Japanese Government about the serious situation and made it appear that Iran was safe." Reportedly, such charges are rampant now.

According to the Japanese cabinet decision, another 180 billion yen will be granted to IJPC, in which Japan and Iran have already invested 500.5 billion yen. Of the Japanese outlay, government subsidy amounted to 20 billion yen and loans from the Export-Import Bank of Japan and others totaled 80 billion yen....

"I think that Mitsui really knows best that IJPC's future is hopeless from the standpoint of profitability or any other standpoint. Mitsui is saying that IJPC will definitely be in the black in the years ahead but I think that inwardly, Mitsui has other thoughts. They are saying that rather than continue any unfavorable relation with Iran, they should complete IJPC which is already 85 percent finished and have the Iranians take over the corporation stocks at market value. If the Iranian side nationalizes and seizes the plant, Mitsui can get away by pleading a case of force majeure. Even if the combinant is completed and produces goods, there is no sales outlet for the products. Iran's domestic consumption is limited. If the products are imported by Japan, domestic makers will face competition. What can we do?" (Statement of aforementioned Igarashi.) "The labor situation was chaotic immediately after the revolution but it is settled now. There is absolutely no chance that the plant will be nationalized upon completion. Because of that, the Japanese Government participated." So says Mitsui.

The Fate of Oil Dependent Diplomacy

Under these circumstances, the question is raised as to why the Japanese Government decided upon an investment with so many risks? A certain high

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official of the Finance Ministry, which is said to have been reluctant to be the last among government agencies to make the outlay, states:

"As long as the nation is investing, it must make the payments. There is the question of future profitability but we are not even certain that Khomeyni (leader of Iran's revolution) intends to see the project to completion. The Iranian Government says that it will definitely not nationalize but the Finance Ministry wanted an official understanding between the two governments. It is said that a memorandum from Premier Bazargan has reached the Foreign Ministry but....

"What we feared most was being told by Iran that 'well, forget it, but in return, we shall not provide oil.' Because of that, we came around to the decision to complete the remaining 15 percent of construction. It is a form of bribery. There might be arguments as to the sum of 20 billion yen for bribery but should the enterprise succeed, Japan would be highly evaluated, even in Iran, for being the only country to remain and finish the project, after all the European countries and United States had evacuated. For a country without natural resources, Japan had no choice but to try."

Oil is mentioned as the problem. Speaking of oil, OPEC chairman and Minister of Petroleum and Mineral Resources of the United Arab Emirates, Otaiba, was given an unprecedented welcome by the government and people when he visited Japan recently.

The government arranged an Imperial audience, the first since Petroleum Minister Yamani of Saudi Arabia, for a cabinet level official visiting Japan. Furthermore, he was presented with the First Class Order of the Sacred Treasure, a decoration which even Yamani could not get. Newspapers and TV stations competed for interviews with Otaiba. Among them, Fuji TV acted as though it were a medium for the government by asking "will you continue giving us oil in the future?" Otaiba was bewildered by a woman interviewer's remark that "Japanese wives in Hokkaido are having a difficult time because of kerosene shortage." Ultimately, he severely criticized Japan's wastage in oil consumption. In an interview, he said, "support Arab's anti-Israel movements" but what he really meant by that statement was for "Japan to cut off relations with Israel." If those who bickered for oil with Otaiba are willing, at his request, "to sever relations with Israel," that is another story. It can be said that by shouting for oil alone, without considering today's world situation which is buried under the oil problem, Japan might fall into a terrible "pitfall" of world politics. It is hoped that Japan will not have to deeply regret the situation someday of seeing no increase in the vital oil supply after having been utilized at will by the oil producing countries, whether in Iran's IJPC project with poor "guarantees" or in the "all-out Japanese welcome" for Otaiba.

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IRAQ

PREPARATIONS FOR ELECTIONS UNDERWAY

Paris AL-WATAN AL-'ARABI in Arabic 25-31 Oct 79 pp 21

[Correspondent's Report datelined Baghdad: "Saddam Hussay in Pledges Free and Direct Popular Elections"]

[Text] Baghdad today is busy drawing the necessary procedures and regulations for establishing its constitutional institutions and electing its representative bodies. However, this preoccupation does not prevent the Iraqi Government from watching closely certain disturbing phenomena on the Arab arena. What are these phenomena? And what worries Iraq?

Perhaps before the end of this year, Iraq will be ready to begin a new stage of national activity, represented by the establishment of constitutional institutions, the foremost, of which is an Iraqi national assembly or a parliament.

It is taken for granted that the election of the members of the national assembly will be free and direct. The elections will be held in a manner apt to build up democracy on a solid basis quite different from those weak and shakey foundations on which the parliaments and the representative councils were built during the modern history of Iraq. Almost all those legislative bodies were a distortion of genuine democracy and the will of the people.

This may be the first time, during the past 20 years, the Iraqis will have a chance to go to the polls to elect their popular representatives.

Hence, the Iraqi political leadership is determined, after a long interruption for various circumstances, which cannot be explained in this report, to see that the new experiment will be sound, correct, logical and rational, rather than follow the model of the superficial elections held in most of the countries of the Third World where referendums and elections recur and the rulers and their representatives win with implausible majorities (99.99 percent). Perhaps President Sadat's referendums and elections are the best evidence of the corruption of such experiments and falsehood of the allegations that they reflect the will of the people and express the hopes, and aspirations of the people and their choice of their genuine representatives.

31

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The 17 July Revolution has been ruling the country for a little over 10 years. But those years have been eventful and full of experiences and circumstances that prevented the fulfillment of this prerequisite of a democratic government.

Stability Helps Democracy

It is true that many of the prevailing circumstances and preoccupations are still impeding the process of building up a constitutional government, but the Iraqi political leadership seems to be determined, today, not to drag its feet in building up constitutional institutions. It considers such work an integral part of national action and national struggle.

In this determination, the Iraqi political leadership is supported by the solid stability of the current regime and its self-confidence and long experience. These conditions are adequate to bring this democratic experiment to a successful and honorable conclusion.

One of the most important conditions which help in expediting the process of creating and electing the representative establishment is the existence of the political establishment represented in the Ba'th party.

Perhaps the Ba'th party in Iraq is different from all the other political organizations in the Arab world or the Third World since it represents authority of the people. In other words, it is not a party created by the ruling regime to flourish and expand in a manner which would make it a parasitic and subservient tool of the regime.

Consequently, the presence of a strong and effective political party gives the democratic process a special meaning and builds its institutions on committed and firm foundations which are not affiliated with any one individual or a particular government.

In fact, a committee was formed last week in which the concerned ministries were represented. The committee was charged with taking the necessary measures for holding elections of a national assembly and a legislative council for the autonomous region.

Laws for the Representative Councils

Earlier, the Ba'th party National Command and the Revolutionary Command Council held several meetings devoted to the discussions of the draft law of the National Assembly and of the Legislative Council for the autonomous region of Kurdistan.

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According to official information "the two councils will be established on the basis of free and direct popular elections in compliance with the policy adopted by the Party and the Revolution calling for completion of society's new democratic structure and increasing the democratic practices of the masses."

The above mentioned two political organizations have already approved the two bills, in principle. The bills will be forwarded to the Council of Ministers for study and discussion. The self-rule bodies will also discuss the bill concerning the legislative council for the autonomous region.

The two bills will also be presented for an open and free discussion in the press, seminars and meetings of the various national organizations. The suggestions and opinions concerning the two bills will then be summarized and sent to the Revolutionary Command Council which will review them in light of the views expressed. The Council will include those suggestions serving the public's interest into the bills and then issue them in their final forms.

However, the attention paid by the Iraqi political leadership to the creation of elected representative councils during this stage does not prevent it from pursuing carefully other national interests, especially the developments on the pan-Arab arena.

Attempt to Distort the Independence and Sovereignty of Iraq

Observers note that the Western media is concentrating on distorting the independence of the Iraqi political leadership. It is also attempting to discredit this leadership through the fabrication of various rumors and distorted information repeatedly reported by the greatest number of information channels and networks.

As an example, there is the allegation that there are Cuban forces in Iraq! The Iraqi President Saddam Hussayin, himself, denied these allegations. In a speech he made in Najaf (150 kilometers to the south of Baghdad) he said "The masters of the White House know the truth, that there is not a single foreign soldier in Iraq."

He went on to say "The Arabs are capable of defending their lands, honor, dignity and principles without seeking aid from any foreigner, far or near, even if he is a friend."

Stressing the independence of Iraq and the pride the Iraqis derive from maintaining sovereignty over their land, he said: "The Iraqis are masters of their land. There is no room in Iraq except for its sons and the sons of the Arab nation. The Iraqis will maintain their loyalty, not only in Iraq but also in all the other parts of the Arab world. Wherever they find

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injustice they will fight against it with the sword of Imam Ali, peace be on him, our Master al-Hussayin, Khalid Ibin al-Walid and Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi and the swords of all the Arab strugglers and all the Moslem leaders in the land of Arabism. We will carry out our mission and we shall win."

Indications Worrying the Iraqis

On another level, some political and partisan circles here are concerned about certain overt and covert initiatives and moves which are currently taking place on the Arab arena.

What disappoints the Iraqis most is the allegation of certain Arab states that the Arabs "receive offers from others and reciprocate with rejection." In other words, these states say that the Arabs have no solid plan or counter-proposals to offer against the current proposals for a solution to the Middle East problem. The Iraqis also are outraged by the whispers in certain capitals about "the necessity of finding a formula other than the Baghdad Summit formula, acceptable to the American camp."

The Iraqis are provoked, as well, by those high voices calling for recognition of the Palestine Liberation Organization in return for its recognition of Israel! Or those voices that call for changing or amending the United Nations resolution 242 return for a Palestinian recognition of the Zionist state and consequently the acceptance of the proposed compromises.

In countering these calls, the Iraqi officials, in their analysis of what is happening on the Arab-international arena, see that there is an insistence, especially from certain mediators, on convincing the Palestinians that the gun is no longer the way and that they should give precedence to a political solution, since the political course is now the only way to salvation at this stage.

The observers believe that political action is necessary and required but on the basis that it should be part of a comprehensive Arab plan and an integrated strategy, rather than being a unilateral political activity. For an example, they ask: What is the value of an international recognition of the PLO if its price will be acceptance of an Israeli entity which refuses the creation of an independent Palestinian entity, at least on Palestinian territory?

With regard to Iraqi-Iranian relations, there is no indication here that Baghdad is certain about the real intentions of the new Iranian regime towards the Arabs, particularly, the Arabs of the Gulf. Consequently, Baghdad has not taken seriously the reports about Arab mediations to dissipate the clouds of tension over the relations between Iran and the Gulf states.

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In this respect, the Iraqis believe that any mediation or effort cannot succeed as long as there is more than one Iranian spokesman making statements, attacking and expressing dormant or awakened dreams and expansionist aspirations with regard to the Arabism of the Gulf.

Hence, the ideal solution, from the Iraqi point of view, lies in Tehran abstaining from following this rough course against the Arabs and in presenting to the Arabs practical evidences of its good intentions and its genuine determination to establish neighborly relations with the Arabs, based on mutual interests and historical ties. Tehran should dispel the notion that there is a vacuum on the Arab side that can only be filled by the winds of the "Iranian revolution" and that the mission of Iran is to export the revolution to its neighbors.

The Iraqis say that when the leaders of the new regime in Iran relinquish these illusions, Arab-Iranian relations will easily overcome the present crisis, and will be based on normal friendship between the two nations without complexes and sensitivities.

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SAUDI ARABIA

BRIEFS

USSR RELATIONS REQUEST--During the forthcoming visit to Saudi Arabia 'Abd-al-Fattah Isma'il, presidium chairman of the PDRY Supreme People's Council, is expected to convey a Soviet request expressing Moscow's eagerness to establish equitable diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia. There was diplomatic relations between the two countries about 40 years ago. [Text] [JN260704 Paris AL-WATAN AL-'ARABI in Arabic 22-28 Nov 79 p 18 JN]

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TUNISIA

HABIB BOURGUIBA'S ROLE IN OUTCOME OF DESTOURIAN PARTY CONGRESS DISCUSSED

Paris JEUNE AFRIQUE in French 26 Sep 79 pp 16, 17

[Article by Tunis Correspondent Souhayr Belhassen]

[Text] Three days after the PSD [Destourian Socialist Party] congress, three presidential decrees fell like the guillotine. They "decapitated" three men who, in varying degrees, had played a role during the 10th Congress: Messrs Abdallah Farhat, Hedi Baccouche and Mahmoud Triki. Only the departure of the first, the minister of defense, was announced, which was a big surprise to many.

For some time, however, the minister's growing influence had irritated President Bourguiba. There had been sufficient circumstances for his discontent to take precise shape. Wanting to determine his position before the 10th Congress met, Bourguiba reviewed the films of previous congresses on 3 August. According to one of his associates, he was upset over the sick-man image which he had given of himself in Monastir in 1971 at the time of the Eighth Congress. This was further grounds for complaint against his adviser at the time, who was none other than Mr Abdallah Farhat, then director of his staff. Had it not been for the prime minister, who said that he had assigned the organization of the congress to the minister of defense, the latter would probably have lost some of his privileges beginning on that day.

After opening the congress in Tunis on 5 September, Bourguiba followed its proceedings from the palace of Carthage by means of a special television installation. On the very first day, he summoned certain congressional participants. According to one of them, the president did not like the "level" of the debates. In his opinion, belaboring the confrontations and denouncing complicities, at the time of the events of 26 January 1978, were clumsy moves. Irritation turned to anger when the participants, one after another, requested the election of the general secretary, Mr Hedi Nouira, by the congress. "But that is a duality of power!" a surprised minister confided to one of his colleagues.

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Abdallah Farhat, who was presiding over the congress, noted this without mentioning the party's bylaws which stipulate that the general secretary is appointed by the chief of state. It was simply as a member of the Central Committee that Mr Nourira was chosen by acclamation.

Bourguiba refused to go and close the congress on Sunday, 9 September. It was the congressional participants who came to him. In the presidential address, there was a grumbling threat: "You have properly fulfilled your duty, although some of you deleted names on the recommendation of their governors." The president did not like seeing the former political bureau rejected in favor of technocrats who had nothing to do with politics. And he liked even less seeing the party flaunt its disagreements. The prime minister then requested an interview. The answer came crashing down: "On Wednesday, as usual," i.e., 12 September.

In the meantime, Bourguiba prepared his campaign alone. His close associates felt him stimulated, but he remained calm and especially silent. Only his son met with him on Sunday afternoon, 9 September, during his walk; but the president still said nothing. On Monday, 10 September, he summoned the party's director, Mr Mohamed Sayah, and granted the interview which he requested for Mr Hassan Belkhodja, minister of agriculture, who was among Bourguiba's former comrades mistreated by the congress.

It was Mr Sayah whom Bourguiba first received: "Well, they scratched you?" "As long as I have your confidence, Mr President, that is all that matters." For 10 minutes, the PSD leader said what he thought about the course of the congress, the use of the army instead and in place of the party's apparatus. The discussion turned to the settlement of scores. Mr Sayah did not mince his words concerning the man whom he considered "his" political enemy, Mr Hedi Baccouche, the prime minister's adviser. In his eyes, it was Mr Baccouche who threw Mr Nourira into the political action by allowing him to address an entire generation which was not his own.

If there has been talk in the international press of discord within the PSD, Mr Sayah blames the director of TAP [Tunis-Africa Press Agency], Mr Mahmoud Triki, who beat Mr Mohamed Sayah's deputy in Sousse. Bourguiba merely listened. Nor did he say anything more with Mr Hassan Belkhodja, who made an effort to point out what risked harming the president's prestige and power. These interviews were not publicized. The prime minister summoned Mr Sayah, who recounted his interview in detail. "If the president is eager for the departure of Baccouche, that will be taken care of," Mr Nourira reportedly replied.

On Tuesday, 11 September, the chief of state did not grant any interviews; he thought. On Wednesday, 12 September, receiving his prime minister in the presence of Mr Bourguiba, Jr, he reaffirmed his confidence in him and asked him to immediately implement the decree announcing the replacement of Mr Abdallah Farhat by Mr Rachid Sfar. The chief of state reportedly first thought of Mr Driss Guiga, Tunisian ambassador to the FRG. But the prime minister tipped the balance in favor of Mr Sfar. The president is fond of

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this young minister (Industry, Mines and Energy) of Mr Nouira. He pursued a career in the Ministry of Finance until he entered the government. The son of a comrade in arms whom Bourguiba particularly likes, Tahar Sfar, he is a native of the region of Mahdia, like Mohamed Masmoudi and Tahar Belkhodja. The second decree put an end to Mr Hedi Baccouche's short political career. A former opponent close to Mr Ben Salah, later rallying to the side of Mr Nouira, he was appointed consul to Lyon (France) and was asked to resign from the Central Committee. TAP director Mahmoud Triki, the victim of the third decree, was assigned to the Tunisian Embassy in France, but will be retained on the Central Committee.

On the evening of 12 September, television viewers noticed a Bourguiba in top form, after receiving Mr Mohamed Mzali, minister of education, and Chedli Klibi, Arab League general secretary, with profuse accolades and smiles, he put out a cold hand to Abdallah Farhat and harangued his former minister.

Bourguiba has always felt that "the army's place was in the barracks." Did he discover meddling in the party's affairs or did he simply punish his defense minister for exceeding his privileges? Nevertheless, the reprimand has left politicians spellbound and some people are wondering. As for the man on the street, he is not surprised. It was even with a slight degree of admiration that a waiter remarked: "The old lion still has deadly claws."

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TUNISIA

FALL OF ABDALLAH FARHAT FROM POWER DISCUSSED

Paris JEUNE AFRIQUE in French 26 Sep 79 p 15

[Article by Abdelaziz Dahmani]

[Text] Tunisian politics of the last 20 years resemble the tragedy of ancient long-distance runners. They ran over a long distance to the point of exhaustion, but often fell before reaching the finish line. In Tunis, this marathon is still controlled with an iron hand by the man who remains president despite his 76 years: Habib Bourguiba.

The most recent victim of this political marathon is Abdallah Farhat, long the powerful minister of defense, following Salah Ben Youssef, Ahmed Ben Salah, Bahi Ladgham, Ahmed Mestiri, Mohamed Masmoudi, Tahar Belkhodja and Habib Achour, all suspected of having aspired to power and advancement outside the plans and interests of Bourguiba.

Mr Abdallah Farhat ran an "exemplary" race since 1956 and was among those rare individuals who, behind Bourguiba, uninterruptedly led the country and played a determining role in the president's choices. His main strength derived from his unwavering devotion to the chief of state, which made him a simultaneously unobtrusive, powerful and feared figure. Some early Destourians still remember his rallying cry at the time of the Youssefist crisis (1955): "Bourguiba, the Sahel is with you!"

In the past, Bourguiba rewarded his loyalty. He even imposed him on the party's political bureau, to which he had not been elected, while he was director of the presidential staff, a post which he occupied for many years. Except for a brief interlude in 1964 as head of the National Investment Company, Farhat had always been a minister (PTT [Postal, Telephone and Telegraph Services], Agriculture, National Defense). Twenty-five years of power have hardly changed his habits: Mr Farhat has not accumulated any villas or cars, nothing ... Married, with no children, this clever hunter with a sporting appearance, looking younger than he is, naturally reserved, was born in Ouardamine in the Sahel in August 1914.

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A PTT employee during the colonial period, Abdallah Farhat came to politics by way of the trade union struggle, specifically as one of the officials of the federation of civil servants, one of the first branches of the Tunisian General Federation of Labor (UGTT). Today at the age of 65, he is perhaps destined for an honorable departure as head of the very same UGTT, whose history of relations with the government is marked by many crises of confidence, the most recent on 26 January 1978.

On that black Thursday, Mr Abdallah Farhat was minister of defense and Col Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali (an officer very close to Abdallah Farhat), director of the national criminal investigation bureau, the army and the police violently put down the riot which was brewing. These tragic events put an end to Mr Abdallah Farhat's unobtrusive isolation, especially since some, like PSD [Destourian Socialist Party] leader Mohamed Sayah, another "strong man," tried to ascribe the heavy responsibility for 26 January to Farhat and to him alone. That is when the minister of defense, to preserve his characteristic image, tried to disassociate himself from the clan of "hard-liners" and to effect a reconciliation with Mr Hedi Nouira.

But Abdallah Farhat made the mistake of not being satisfied with being minister of defense, godfather of the heads of the national criminal investigation bureau and the radio, treasurer and political bureau member. He wanted even more. He organized the 10th PSD Congress, got himself elected chairman of that congress and put his name at the top of the list of candidates for the Central Committee, before those of National Assembly chairman Sadok Mokkadem, Habib Bourguiba, Jr, and others. Abdallah Farhat is today paying very dearly for those prestige campaigns.

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TUNISIA

TENSION REPORTED TO BE UNDERLYING SURFACE CALM

London THE MIDDLE EAST in English Nov 79 pp 46-48

[Text] Will Tunisia be any different after the long-awaited 10th Congress of the ruling Parti Socialiste Destourien? Our Correspondent Susan Morgan went there to find out last month and came to the conclusion that little has changed. Despite the apparent triumph of Premier Hedi Nouira, there is still a mixture of surface calm and underlying tension prevailing in Tunisia.

The most significant aspect of Tunisia's tenth party congress was the demonstration by President Bourguiba--ailing for the past decade--that he still runs the show. The pre-election congress of Tunisia's single Parti Socialiste Destourien (PSD), held in September, was supposed to be the most important political event since the bloody rioting of January 1978 and was intended to prepare the country for the post-Bourguiba era. It was notably supposed to confirm and strengthen the hand of Premier Hedi Nouira (also Secretary General of the party) as the designated successor to Bourguiba.

In the event, Nouira's apparent triumph was overshadowed by the swift and unexpected manoeuvres of the head of state himself in the aftermath of the conference. On 12 September the President dismissed Abdallah Farhat, the powerful Minister of Defense and the main responsible for organizing the congress. Shortly afterwards Hedi Baccouche, the Premier's political counsellor, and finally Mahmoud Triki, director of the national news agency TAP, were quietly removed. All three were close supporters of the Prime Minister.

The dismissals were prompted by the President's finely-honed political instincts of survival; a man who is too powerful represents a threat. In addition to his ministerial post, Farhat headed the radio, was treasurer of the party and was a member of its decision-making body, the 20-man political bureau. This concern turned to alarm when Bourguiba saw Farhat packing the congress with his own military men although the reports in the foreign press of abortive military coups were wild misrepresentations.

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However, Bourguiba's sudden flexing of semi-dormant political muscles leaves unanswered the question: how long will he be able to show he is in control? The major question mark is over his health. Those at the congress were astonished at how well and fit he looked--but suspected he might well relapse in the next few months to take a back seat once more.

Although Nouira--the star of the congress--was cut down to size by the removal of these key allies, this does not seem to have seriously compromised his position as dauphin. Nor is there now any obvious competitor for this post, after the showdown of January 1978 which broke the back of the main challenge to the Government, the Union Generale des Travailleurs Tunisiens (UGTT) and led to the imprisonment of Habib Achour, darling of the doctrinaire opposition.

Nevertheless, though the odds are on Nouira taking power after Bourguiba (largely because he was appointed by him) Tunisians point out that he can never have the stature of the "supreme-combatant." He will, they say, merely be the man appointed Premier, and this will herald, rather than end, political infighting.

Nouira described the congress to The Middle East as "a vital moment in the history of the party"; he claimed in his 50-page, exhaustive speech that the congress had discussed for the first time every aspect of Tunisian life: politics, social affairs and economics. He pronounced himself satisfied and claimed that the congress had "undoubtedly" helped in directing the politically delicate transition to the future.

Muhammad Sayah, hardline head of the party's political bureau, also exuded confidence with not a hint of his recent personal setback when he just scraped onto the list of the 80 elected to the central committee. He insisted that the party had the active support of the people.

Nevertheless, his own setback, and that of a number of his allies who failed to get elected at all, pointed to discontent in the party's ranks. It suggested that Sayah's hardline approach was being challenged, while the election of a number of unknown technocrats indicated that the rank and file wanted to inject new blood and dynamism into a moribund party, withering from lack of opposition.

If the rank and file felt unhappy, the tolerated opposition Social Democrat Movement was still more unhappy. Ahmed Mestiri, the party's head, professed himself "very disappointed" by the congress--and added that this view was not confined to his grouping. Mestiri was particularly bitter about the tone of the seven-and-a-half-hour discourse by the Premier, which he said "shut the door where the President had opened it." He said that most key issues were not discussed at the congress at all. The Social Democrats have decided to boycott the November elections.

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Certainly, the President's brief and cogent opening speech (which explicitly praised Nouira for accomplishing his "immense task") ended with a call for national unity. Nouira, on the other hand, made bitter reference to the political opposition and closed the door firmly on any extension of influence beyond the confines of the party.

Although the congress had been expected to discuss in principle broad questions relevant to Tunisia's future--such as the kind of society Tunisia wants and the role of the individual in it as well as Tunisia's role on the international stage--participants complained that, far from being asked their opinions they were dictated to. Again, although Nouira's new, more liberal approach to party politics won the day over Sayah's hard line the limitations are still stifling. The feeling is of a country which has outgrown its political institutions but is not offered an alternative. Nor, while the President is still alive, is anyone prepared to alter the system. True, for the first time candidates for this month's election for the National Assembly can select 112 names from a list of twice that number--but the extent of change this brings is insignificant.

Although the Social Democrats say that continuing political restriction and repression make violent political interference more likely--and they hint at the army and Libya--the mood in Tunisia, apart from excitement and political jockeying at the top, is surprisingly calm. The cafes and pavements are full of people who talk freely, and the bourgeoisie exude well-being and confidence.

Police activity is so discreet as to pass unnoticed and there is now nothing to recall the events of January 1978 which led, according to opposition estimates, to several hundred being killed in the rioting that accompanied the general strike. The ominous "civilian service" work camps for unemployed youths organized by the Interior Ministry in the aftermath of January 1978 have all but lapsed, mainly because they were too expensive.

This debacle was the culmination of the campaign by the UGTT (which claimed the support of 600,000 workers) to challenge the Government and install a more radical political system. Its organization was as large as the Government's own PSD--and a good deal more dynamic. In the event, owing to a serious political miscalculation by its head, the veteran union leader Habib Achour, the challenge was overcome and the Government won a resounding victory.

Hundreds of union militants and officials were imprisoned, mostly for short periods. Although the majority have now been released (after some had allegedly been tortured) the shock to a peaceful country like Tunisia has acted as a deterrent to further attempts of this kind. Moreover, although Habib Achour himself has been released (but is still under house arrest) other key leaders are still detained.

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The UGTT itself is now under the tame leadership of Tijani Abid (who told The Middle East that the organization had not really changed--but was merely no longer politicized) and there are even some strikes, but not for overtly political reasons. However, the political will of the movement was broken during "Bloody Thursday" in 1978 and shows no signs of reviving. Tunisians say many workers still consider Habib Achour to be the true union leader. But without the framework of the mass movement in which to operate, pro-Achour workers are now quiescent and isolated.

The crushing of the political union represented a triumph for the Government. But the danger is that the elite may be leading the country along a political cul-de-sac. Although Nouria insisted to The Middle East that the PSD responds to people's needs and is the "ideal forum for ideas to be expressed," and he explicitly rejected the need for a multiparty system, few Tunisians really believe that the official party has much genuine support. In the countryside it is effective because it represents the only organization there is and because peasants have learnt that playing the political game results in benefits in the form of housing and loans.

Apart from the PSD, the Social Democrats, a tolerated reformist group, are losing credibility. They have been badly overtaken by events (particularly the general strike) and hold little appeal for Tunisia's youth--which makes up half the population. The movement's leadership is composed entirely of former ministers who have little to offer in the way of an alternative programme--as Nouria pointed out.

Nevertheless, they do represent an effective pressure group and l'Errai and Democratie, their two permitted publications, are avidly read as the only source of objective news since al-Chaab, the UGTT paper, was closed.

Further to the left is the clandestine opposition, represented by the pro-Soviet Tunisian Communist Party and Ahmed Ben Salah's Movement of Popular Unity, most of whose support is outside the country. Ben Salah himself, responsible for the heavy collectivization of the 1960s, was recently in Algeria, presumably canvassing support. Students support a number of left-wing movements, including a Maoist group, but, apart from a number of strikes at the university, they present no threat of real disruption.

Other figures from Tunisia's past are now trying to make a comeback in the more favorable political atmosphere. Taher Belkhodja, former Minister of the Interior, whose sacking in December 1977 by Bourguiba precipitated the resignations of half a dozen ministers, presented himself as a candidate at the recent congressional elections; the other ministers have been consistently trying to return to political favor.

The latest new voice, which surfaced some two years ago, is that of the Islamic revivalists, riding on the crest of the Iranian Khomeini wave. Social pressures, notably unemployment, and the lack of relevant political alternatives have revived Islam as a political as well as a religious

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force. Mosques are crowded with young people listening to frequently inflammatory speeches by young mullahs such as Ghoorbani. When former Minister of Defense Abdallah Farhat closed some large mosques for "repairs" devotees merely went to smaller mosques instead.

Although the movement has a good deal of influence, Tunisians say there is no real parallel with Iranian events. The recent emergence of Islam, in particular, indicates the pressures to which the regime is subject. These are more social than political.

Unemployment is the major preoccupation of the Tunisian leadership. The problem is exacerbated by an excellent education system which leaves school leavers unwilling to accept manual work or tasks they think are beneath them. Nourira said that fully one-third of the budget is devoted to education--and two-thirds to social objectives--remarkable for a developing country of its relatively slender resources.

So far the country's economic performance has been impressive at about 6 percent growth a year obtained by a judicious blend of state intervention and laissez-faire liberalism. However, prospects are likely to be jeopardized by the enlargement of the European Economic Community and subsequent loss of markets. This is also likely to entail further unemployment--mitigated at present by heavy emigration (itself indicative of the problems).

The most successful area has been industrialization, the least successful agriculture, where three years of drought has badly affected production, notably of cereals. The aim is to balance farm trade by 1981, but this looks optimistic.

The Government is certainly aware of the problems. In its own terms it has clocked up impressive economic successes. Nourira himself believes the key is employment--"which gives citizens dignity and frees them from falling prey to foreign ideologies." However sincere this paternalistic view, it leaves a number of questions unanswered. The observer is left with the feeling that however worthy the men who rule Tunisia are, they fail to reflect or represent the aspirations of the masses. That the leadership is of advanced age in a young country makes the problem greater.

Tunisia's role on the international stage remains that of a mediator--whether over the Sahara or in the Middle East. It may be encouraged to play a more active role here, as the headquarters of the Arab League was recently moved to Tunis.

The only cloud on the horizon is its erratic neighbor Libya--although little has been heard of Libyan involvement since the general strike, when Colonel Qaddafi was believed by Premier Nourira and others to have been involved, probably through Muhammad Masmoudi, former Foreign Minister and architect of the disastrous attempted merger between Libya and Tunisia at Djerba in 1974. Masmoudi is now under house arrest. His chances of making a political comeback are considered slim.

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Finally, for all the peace and calm now reigning in Tunisia, it is difficult to avoid the feeling that the malaise which produced the mass support for the rash of strikes throughout 1977, culminating in the abortive general strike of 1978, has not been resolved but merely swept under the carpet. Even though there is now no champion to lead such a movement, it cannot be written off.

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TUNISIA

PRIME MINISTER DISCUSSES PSD CONGRESS, LABOR PROBLEMS, PLAN

London THE MIDDLE EAST in English Nov 79 p 48

[Text] The Tunisian Prime Minister, Hedi Nouira, has described the recent 10th Congress of the ruling Parti Socialiste Destourien (PSD) as a landmark in the history of the party and hinted that it has paved the way for the post-Bourguiba period. In an interview with The Middle East, he also spoke of the lessons drawn from the 1978 labor problems, the success of the Five Year Plan and the emphasis being put on building up new industries.

What are the results of the tenth party congress? After a very exhaustive study of economic, social and political developments, the party once again endorsed the conduct of Tunisian affairs.

And what is the most vital aspect of Tunisian life? For me, without any doubt, it is employment, because it represents man's dignity. Without it he can be a prey to anyone and to an alien ideology. Tunisia's wealth lies in its people--and education plays a vital role. We spend one-third of our budget on education alone and two-thirds on purely social matters.

Does the new leadership of the UGTT embody the aspirations of the Tunisian workers? Well, it has not changed any of its objectives like defending workers' rights and fighting to improve their living conditions. But there is a difference of substance. Instead of adopting what can be described as a "conflict approach" to solve the problems, it is taking a "participatory approach"--supported, it seems to me, by most of Tunisia's workers.

Do you feel that the PSD, after 45 years of existence as Tunisia's sole political party, is capable of facing Tunisia's political realities? Undeniably. We are the only political group and political force capable of developing the structures that make up Tunisian society at present. This is mainly due to the fact that we are constantly in touch with the country. We are the ideal platform for debating ideas and initiating projects, and we have the strength to carry them out.

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In your speech at the tenth congress you stressed that the people had drawn certain lessons from the events of January 1978. Are you convinced that the circumstances that led to those events are no longer there? Experience has now shown that we were a little unattentive. I think that the conditions which led to the events were totally abnormal--nor were they really Tunisian. There was very strong interference and we found ourselves faced with an explosion.

What interference do you mean? This was fed by international pressure groups which are just as virulent as multinationals.

What role did Libya play in this? All I can say is that it was involved.

But do you think exploitation by outside groups was made easier by internal conditions at the time? No doubt about that. Besides, the political direction of the UGTT was far from that of national policy. But the attitude of many of the people was influenced by foreign ideology.

Would you say the Five-Year Plan for social and economic development, now in its fourth year, has been a success? We never said it was a success. We have to wait until the five years are up. But it has not gone too badly, given Tunisia's means. We have succeeded in overcoming the international constraints placed upon us. Many other countries, far better endowed than us, have failed where we succeeded.

Which sector has been the most successful? Certainly industrialization. The past two years have allowed the consolidation of the industrialization process and the creation of industries which can absorb employment. Our aim is the creation of employment.

But we do have problems, such as in the agricultural sector. Because of the restrictions imposed by our water resources, we are trying to speed up our irrigation programme. Agriculture accounts for 20 to 24 percent of our GNP.

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WESTERN SAHARA

SAHARAN WAR BECOMING INCREASINGLY LARGE SCALE VENDETTA

Paris JEUNE AFRIQUE in French 24 Oct 79 pp 46-51

[Article: "The Big Blood Letting"]

[Text] Morocco controls the urban centers. The POLISARIO can travel anywhere but cannot establish itself in one place. The war is becoming increasingly a large scale vendetta.

The guerrilla war taking place in the Western Sahara is a curious one. Bringing 30,000 soldiers of the Royal Armed Forces [FAR] into combat with 4,000 POLISARIO rebels, it is both a traditional and an original war. Traditional in that, as in all confrontations of this kind, the insurgents have the benefit of surprise. Original, first of all in that it obeys secular traditions of the region: the use of tribal rivalries -- between, for example, the Reguibat on the Algerian side and the Ait-Oussa on the Moroccan side -- and of the technique of raids against cities and convoys. Apart from the fact that the double tank Land-Rover has taken the place of the camel with two humps. Original also in that the civilian population concerned is as physically divided as it is possible to be.

As it should, the POLISARIO swims "like a fish in the water," according to the sacred formula. But it has moved its bowl into foreign territory, into Algeria. That is good, because it makes a relative renewal of its strength possible. But it is less good in that it deprives it of a major asset in any guerrilla warfare: to be present within the enemy citadel.

In this regard, the land and the numerical weakness of the people (a total of 56,000 individuals) work in favor of Morocco. Morocco has exploited them thoroughly: the settlement process -- accompanied by numerous social and material advantages -- allows it to control the Sahrawis and to offer them better guarantees of security at the same time. Unlike regular armies which have had to suppress guerrilla movements, the Moroccan army does not move in a politically hostile environment. Neither does it fight on completely unknown terrain. Set up in special units or dispersed, 5,000 Sahrawis (the figure is higher than the numbers of the POLISARIO) are fighting in the ranks of the FAR. They know the terrain as well as their

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adversaries and are experienced in the same battle techniques. They give the soldiers and officers from the north the benefit of their knowledge. This is a very important card which Morocco has not yet played. "When we receive the order," a Moroccan officer told us, "we will be able to return blow for blow, using the same methods, on Algerian territory."

Blow For Blow

All these "constraints" give the first modern guerrilla war in the desert its particular color. The POLISARIO cannot set as its goal the progressive "liberation" of the territory it claims. One does not liberate completely empty stretches of stones and sand. If it were to consider setting up a fixed base, it would be exposed to certain destruction. It can at most occupy a point long enough to hold a press conference.

Thus, the POLISARIO can circulate in complete peace, but cannot settle anywhere. Obviously, the FAR cannot control a 200,000 square kilometer desert.* Even if they could do it, the cost of it would be exorbitant in relation to the possible results. The Moroccan military philosophy is primarily inspired by the anti-submarine combat of World War II. It is as useless to look for a POLISARIO column in the desert as for a submarine in the ocean. To seal off the Algerian border would not serve any purpose as the POLISARIO would then quietly pass through the northern part of Mali and the Mauritanian border. There is not a variety of solutions, but only one: to draw a net around the choice targets of the adversary -- the harbor in one case, the agglomerations in the other -- and to do their best to protect the convoys. The military protection of urban centers such as Seguia el Hanra-El Aïoun, Smara, Boujdour, Guelta, etcetera, is remarkably effective. All of them are surrounded by a "security belt" with an average 30 kilometer radius which makes them safe from the medium range weapons of the POLISARIO.

A belt, which is made up of posts separated by mine fields, studded with electronic gadgets including radar which automatically regulate and command the firing of cannons with lethal precision. As a matter of fact, every time the POLISARIO announces that it has attacked a city, it means that it has tried to attack posts in the security belt, which it has never managed to cross. It always gets caught in a net made of very tight mesh. This was the case in Boujdour in July 1978, and in El Aïoun in June 1979, where, contrary to its claims, the POLISARIO did not succeed -- as I have been able to observe -- in damaging, and even less in destroying the harbor.

These failures are all the more frustrating as the future of the guerrilla warfare depends on its ability to hit the urban centers. Because the objectives of guerrilla warfare are more political than military: to sow insecurity in the civilian population to prove that the authorities are incapable of protecting them and to achieve a glorious feat which might mobilize the sympathies of international public opinion.

* 270,000 square kilometers when Tiris el-Gharbia is included.

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It is undoubtedly in order to compensate for its failures in that part of the Sahara, which was ceded back to Morocco by Spain in 1975, that the POLISARIO has concentrated its attacks since the beginning of this year on agglomerations located in "uncontested territory," according to the official Moroccan terminology: Tan Tan, south of Agadir, and Assa in the east. Even though the scope of these raids has been greatly exaggerated, it is unquestionable that the POLISARIO has scored diplomatic points. But, now that the first effect of surprise has been digested, the FAR has begun to complete its response to the raids in areas which had been poorly defended.

POLISARIO Victim of Exaggerations

The first attack on Tan Tan took place on 28 January 1979. At 1330 hours, the first wave of a column of 60 to 100 jeeps reached the suburbs of the city where, as a matter of fact, the main barracks are located. The fighting continued until 1500 hours. The POLISARIO commando never succeeded in penetrating the heart of the city. An electric power station was damaged. Only the two huge concrete camels, which mark the entrance to the city, still bare traces of the fighting on 28 January.

Since then, the POLISARIO has tried three times to penetrate Tan Tan, but each time it was stopped more than 30 kilometers from the city. The raid of 27 June was particularly important. A POLISARIO personality, Soued Ould Seghier, lost his life to it. The target of the commando was the harbor, which a French company is completing. The rebels undoubtedly intended a repeat performance of Zouerate by kidnapping foreign technicians. Contrary to its statements, the POLISARIO damaged neither the harbor nor the airport, as I was able to see a few days later. Numerous indications lead one to think that the leadership of the POLISARIO is itself the victim of the exaggerations of its fighters... The costly and repeated attacks on Tan Tan -- which is, moreover, reputed to be poorly defended -- prove the obvious fact that the goal which is being pursued is to reach minds inside as well as outside Morocco.

The deadly raid, at the beginning of June, on the small locality of Assa -- in the area of Goulimine -- was intended to produce the rallying, or at least the collaboration of the tribes (Ait-Oussa) of a particularly underprivileged region.

The Moroccan army has neither the means nor the manpower to enclose the cities and villages of the south and east with security belts comparable to those which it has set up in the "contested" Sahara. If it were to do this, it would fulfil the wishes of the POLISARIO and Algerian strategists who would like to immobilize it in passive defense tasks. Furthermore, this would imply an impossible settlement of the nomads and the grouping together of the inhabitants of the scarcely populated villages. Finally, the layout of the land, which is more uneven, allows for a more mobile defense.

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The establishment of an airtight belt like the one around Smara, which is located on flat land, is less justified for Tan Tan where the surrounding area consists of ridges, which facilitate surveillance and the establishment of limited crossing points.

In the Tan Tan region, a buffer province between the north and the extreme south, the army plays a more dynamic role with less manpower than elsewhere. There is no need at all for the security belt here to be airtight and continuous. Numerous posts with only a few men, which are visible along the road to the harbor or to the airport, are primarily intended to prevent individual infiltrations. The key element for the protection of the city remains the "shock troop" (a reinforced 300 man platoon). I encountered one on manoeuvres around Tan Tan. They bear an uncanny resemblance to the idea or the image one might have of a POLISARIO commando.

Largely Autonomous Units

The majority of them are Saharan males. Their faces wrapped in black scarves, they have the same equipment: Land-Rovers equipped with mortars, heavy or light machine guns, double barreled guns and radios. Having been trained in the same combat techniques as the POLISARIO, the FAR commandos are capable of fighting for 6 hours without resupplying, of covering 400 kilometers or of patrolling alone for 6 days.

In addition to ensuring the defense of Tan Tan, these very mobile commandos go to the aid of convoys and posts under attack. They frequently intervene in other sectors, pushing out as far as Smara. "We have only two regrets," a captain told me. "The first is the intervention of our air force which sometimes deprives us of our prey, and the second is not to be able to operate in Algeria." The commando group he belongs to intervened 29 times in 6 months and suffered only 2 deaths. It is true that the morale in the mobile units is incomparably higher than in the permanent posts. This is probably why soldiers stationed in the latter have received permission to leave their shelters to go and meet the rebel units, while waiting to be relieved by reinforcements.

Defend Uncontested Provinces

More to the east, on the side of the Algerian border, the reorganization of the defense structure involves a more spectacular element: the arming of part of the civilian population. Even though it had been rejected for a long time, the measure was taken following the attack at the beginning of June, of which the small city of Assa was the victim. Mr Bensouda, councilor to the king, who came to enquire as to the needs of the people, was told: "We want to meet with the king." Hassan II received a delegation from the city of Assa in the presence of the members of the National Security Council. The substance of what the delegates said to him was: "We gladly accept the economic sacrifices imposed on us by the state of war of our country. But at least we want to have weapons to defend our lives and our property." Hassan II agreed. Immediately, a distribution

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of light weapons to part of the population was organized -- accompanied by rudimentary training. In addition, the armed men have been entrusted with the mission of providing information about possible enemy movements in the area. The measure will be generalized only if the situation requires it. This, together with the proclamation of a state of alert at the border, is a step toward a general confrontation with Algeria.

The new structure should, in the eyes of the officers of the FAR, protect the "uncontested" provinces from large scale raids like the one of 28 January on Tan Tan or of June on Assa. "Of course," one high ranking officer told me, "we are not excluding minor actions against small groups of isolated civilians." As we were driving peacefully toward Agadir, we were surprised to discover that night travel between Goulimine and Tan Tan was prohibited. To avoid the taking of hostages, which would be embarrassing to Morocco, foreigners no longer have the right to travel south of Goulimine. Thus, paradoxically, it is the agglomerations in the provinces which were "recovered" in 1975, which are best protected.

The deadly attacks, which took place last August, on Bir Enzaran and Lebcurate prove that the security of the south-eastern provinces, within the former borders, has not yet been ensured. The lessons to be drawn from these two operations are not identical. In the first case one cannot speak of a POLISARIO victory as the Moroccan army resisted while outnumbered seven to one. The second case was unquestionably a military victory for the POLISARIO. But one question arises: how can a guerrilla movement of 4,000 combatants mobilize 3,000 of them for each of these two operations? One will have to wait to find out if the FAR will succeed in finding a response to massive attacks where they are numerically inferior.

Defensive Mission

One can easily imagine that life in the Sahara would be impossible without the regular provision of supplies to the people and the isolated military posts. In the most out of the way places, even water must be transported. And nothing is more vulnerable than a line of trucks on a road. A few isolated and camouflaged jeeps on a hill can direct deadly fire. And the POLISARIO does not fail to do this. Military convoys, which do not have to use the roads and which can progress in a way adapted to the terrain, are obviously less vulnerable than the civilian convoys. A convoy of 150 trucks, following each other at intervals of 200 meters, along a main road is spread out over 30 kilometers! It constitutes an ideal target, in spite of the military protection it may enjoy.

However, the draconian measures which have just been taken limit the risks considerably. Roads are used only as a last recourse. The maritime link between Agadir and El Aioun is given maximum use. Helicopters and the more expensive C-130 transport planes are used as back-up means. A Puma ensures the civilian link between El Aioun and Boujdour. The transportation of useless merchandise, such as television sets, hi-fi systems and fabrics, from El Aioun toward the northern part of the country seems to have been

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prohibited. Finally, the size of the convoys, in terms of the number of trucks, has been increased with a reduction of their frequency.

Together with attacks on cities and convoys, the harassing of posts constitutes the third type of action by the POLISARIO. The isolated and irregular firing of shells, at a distance of some 10 kilometers, causes more noise than damage. They hit only by a miracle. Their psychological effect has been reduced. They no longer even interrupt the soldiers' card games.

Thus, the primary objective of the Royal Armed Forces is to defend the civilian population, the reliability of normal life and the regional exploitation operations. Their mission is essentially, but not solely, defensive.

POLISARIO Strategy

The army conducts combing operations. Thus, Colonel Oujami's 6th Regiment, made up of elite soldiers and officers, continuously crisscross the Sahara. Its missions could last as long as a month. It covers 1,000 to 2,000 kilometers per week. The movement of 3,000 men with their hundreds of vehicles (Land-Rovers, trucks, light armored cars) is particularly impressive. A certain permissiveness in their appearance -- which is not much tolerated elsewhere --, hair worn long, the traditional black scarf over the face, grumbling and the frankness of relationships, indicates that these heroes of mechanized Westerns are far removed from the civilized life of the barracks or of the staff headquarters. Yet, the 6th Regiment has never, not ever, met a single rebel during its combing operations. The POLISARIO avoids -- and this is in the nature of guerrilla warfare -- any contact with the operating units. Could the combings be useless? They often make it possible to find caches and to seize food and ammunition in them. They familiarize the men with the terrain, foster a fighting spirit and, finally, hinder the movements of the POLISARIO. If these advantages are important, they are not a determining factor in the eyes of some officers. The cost in equipment would be exorbitant compared to the results. There is little probability that the more mobile hunting commando groups, which were recently set up, will have better results. When all is said and done, and contrary to what is often said, the Moroccan army has the situation well under control, but at a relatively substantial price in loss of human lives. Until last August, the estimated number of dead per month could be set at 40. Following Bir Enzaran and Lebouirate, the monthly average has certainly gone beyond the 100 mark. At least for the year 1979. The FAR are facing an enemy which is becoming more seasoned as the years go by; the scattered and disorganized attacks of earlier times have been succeeded by raids conducted according to the rules.

An important POLISARIO operation, such as an attempted attack on a city, might require a month of preparation. To organize the logistics of some 100 jeeps, with 300 to 400 men, who have to live in the desert while awaiting the right moment, is not an easy thing to do. One must pick out the rendezvous places, stock the caches with gasoline, ammunition, powdered milk, dried meat and water. Raids usually take place at dawn and preferably under

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overcast skies to prevent the intervention of the air force. The commando is divided into three groups. The first, referred to as the attack group, tries to break down the Moroccan posts by surprise. The jeeps arrive in scattered order and regroup only in front of the objective.

Well Armed Guerrillas

As a general rule, this first group knows that it will encounter a resistance which will compell it to retreat. But it is an offensive retreat which consists in luring the pursuers to a place where the second group, referred to as the fall back group, is waiting for them. After having fought, this group in turn tries to lure them toward an ambush prepared by a third group, referred to as the collection group. The three groups fall back while changing positions and exchanging their roles. They are served by a knowledge of the terrain which allows them to keep the initiative, even during the withdrawal. One of the concerns of the Moroccan officers is to be able to cut off the retreat of the POLISARIO in places which the FAR has chosen.

Spread out over some 20 kilometers or more, the jeeps of these three groups are not easily destroyed. The Moroccan F5s can intervene only when the sky is clear. As a matter of fact, the POLISARIO has at its disposal SAM 7 rockets, with a 2,000 meter range, which requires that Moroccan planes intervene in groups of two. While the first pilot goes into a dive over the enemy, the second flies at a high altitude to tell his comrade to clear out as soon as he sees the characteristic white trail of the SAM 7.

It is the general opinion that the officers of the POLISARIO have made a great deal of progress in taking advantage of the terrain. Their mobility forces the Moroccan troops to use light equipment which, with the exception of the AML (light armored cars), is inferior to that of their adversaries. The POLISARIO has light Russian arms of the very latest make at its disposal, supplied by Libya. Its jeeps draw 75 millimeter guns or carry Stalin organs, rocket launchers with a 22 kilometer range, very deadly 23 millimeter double barreled anti-aircraft guns, 14.5 machine guns, anti-aircraft SAM 7s, Kalashnikov rifles, RPG [Rocket propelled grenade] 7 bazookas, capable of damaging a blockhouse, etcetera. It would be hard for the Moroccans to do better, except for having greater range of fire. It is not a minor paradox of this confrontation that the regular army and the guerrillas fight with more or less equal arms and that, at least at the beginning of the raid, the latter dispose of a numerical superiority. Confrontations rarely last more than 4 hours. Then the members of the commando group scatter in order to regroup at their rendezvous locations. The POLISARIO makes life difficult for the FAR. But, barring exceptions such as at Lebourate, it is difficult for the POLISARIO to be victorious in these raids against the defenses of the Sahrawi cities. At each confrontation, the Moroccan troops put one-third to one-half of the manpower and equipment of the enemy commando out of commission.

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War Reconversion

Certain Moroccan officers believe that the POLISARIO is being carried along in a developmental logic of its operational units which has been experienced by other guerrilla movements before it. The more it adopts the characteristics of a regular army, the more important its logistic needs will become and the more vulnerable it will become. The battles of Bir Enzaran and Lebouirate have, for the moment, proven the opposite. It is well known that armies prefer traditional wars... The Moroccan army is no exception. At the beginning of the conflict it was psychologically poorly prepared to fight a guerrilla war. Life in isolated posts, under a blazing sun, without water in abundance, is trying for the strongest nerves.

Army Adaptation to Desert

To spend 3 to 4 years in a row in a "hole" (with no leaves) while awaiting an unpredictable enemy attack, with no other information than what is broadcast by the Algerian radio or the rumors sometimes peddled by soldiers on leave, does not lift the morale of the troops. Especially when certain officers, who were ill prepared for life in the field and for the direct command of troops, lived in ostentatious comfort. Things have changed a great deal. First of all, there was the appointment of Colonel Major Abrouk to the position of chief of staff of the southern front. A fellow graduate of Colonel Major Dlimi, this Berber warrior from the Middle Atlas, who was trained at the War School in Paris, is evidently more at ease in the field than in his office. Tall, balding and with constantly smiling eyes, this 50 year old man hides a great determination under his appearance of a jovial peasant or a good family man. He exercises a quiet authority and a natural influence over his subordinates. While director of the Military Academy in Meknes, he developed the general training program for student officers.

He had distinguished himself by his manner, both firm and liberal, of exercising his command. He has not changed. Obeyed without servility, he apparently holds open house for his officers in El Aloun. Colonel Major Abrouk likes to talk and joke, but he reveals little about himself or about the war he is waging.

He has introduced an information policy for the troops with regard to the war, which does not hide (all?) the losses on the Moroccan side but which has served to lift their morale. Being aggressive, he cultivates the fighting spirit of his officers and his troops. Colonel Major Abrouk inaugurated his command by evacuating points where there was no civilian population, such as Guelta, Hagounia and Amgala. Which caused the POLISARIO to say that they had liberated them... Nevertheless, the FAR continue to occupy strategic points even when they are depopulated. On the other hand, the sorties seem to have become more numerous.

More or less at the same time as Abrouk's appointment, the officers who exhibited little taste for the war and life in the desert were "repatriated" to the north. Their replacements seem to exhibit a greater readiness to

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fight. Well fed, impeccably dressed, meticulously maintaining their barracks and their equipment, the FAR show signs of a developed army. The field officers -- up to the rank of colonel -- live and fight with their soldiers. They show concern for the well being of their troops and willinly admit to being sparing of human lives. Soldiers -- like the officers -- receive double pay in the Sahara. But 6 months in the desert, without leave, is rather unbearable. Maybe leaves will become more frequent. Life at the posts is certainly not pleasant; alerts, more often false than real, during the day as well as at night, are hard on the nerves. The fact that the soldiers grumble does not mean that they revolt. Proof of this lies in the courage and the readiness to fight with which, as a rule, they confront the POLISARIO. Their patriotic motivation is surprising for a regular army.

It is no less true, however, that the Moroccan army is suffering from the faults of its model, the French army. The morale of the troops would undoubtedly be better if the bureaucratic slowness, the bureaucratic absurdities were to be ended.

War widows often have to wait a year before receiving their pensions. The newly promoted have to wait as long to get their salaries adjusted. And at the same time, the money does exist and the recalled soldiers are always paid; but, payment is made in Rabat... One Casablanca family found out 3 weeks late and by accident about the death of one of its members at the front! Officers and soldiers in the field do not put up well with having to fill out repair forms for the slightest breakdown of a vehicle...

The morale of the officers is high. But the majority of them are somewhat mortified at having to carry out what they call "gendarmierie operations," while they dream of doing battle with Algeria. "Our problem," one colonel told us, "is no longer to defend ourselves, but to revenge ourselves." This state of mind does not fail to affect the handling of the war. Also, many officers believe that it is not very profitable, in terms of men and equipment, to pursue isolated POLISARIO jeeps. As far as they are concerned, only war against Algeria will bring an end to the war against the POLISARIO.

Spectre of War

While regular armies have a tendency to underestimate the importance of their equipment, many high ranking Moroccan officers believe, as a colonel told us, "that to refer to the inadequacy of the FAR in terms of equipment, is a pretext not to wage war. Since 1976 we have been saying that the conflict must be transferred onto enemy territory. If it were not for the king's policy of peace, I would long ago have moved on Algeria." For all of them, it is absolutely inconceivable that Morocco would give up an inch of territory. Convinced that Algeria is using the Sahrawi cause as a pretext to bring "Morocco to its knees," many of them believe that, peaceful solution or not, "it will in any case be necessary to teach Algeria a lesson."

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"We have been bled white," one colonel said to me. "We have every interest in waging war with Algeria to show it that if it does not accept the fact of our two countries staying afloat, then we will sink together."

From this point of view, a draw -- no officer hopes for this any longer -- would be a victory for Morocco. While awaiting for the big settling of scores, the Moroccan officers believe that limited reprisal actions on Algerian territory would not necessarily result in a generalized response from the enemy. One thing is certain: tightly compressed, like a spring, Hassan II's army will inflict pain when it is released.

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59

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